MISS LULU BETT

A Play By

ZONA GALE

SIMON
1691 32ND ST., N.W.
WASHINGTON 7, D.C.

SIMON
1801 32ND ST., N.W.
WASHINGTON 7, D.C.

MISS LULU BETT

ZONA GALE

By ZONA GALE

PREFACE TO A LIFE—A NOVEL
MISTER PITT—A PLAY
FAINT PERFUME—A NOVEL
MISS LULU BETT—A NOVEL
MISS LULU BETT—A PLAY

MISS LULU BETT

AN AMERICAN COMEDY OF MANNERS

BY

ZONA GALE

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TO

BROCK PEMBERTON

IN DEEP APPRECIATION
OF HIS CREATIVE WORK
IN PRODUCING AND STAGING
THIS PLAY

THE AUTHOR WISHES TO
MAKE ACKNOWLEDGMENT TO
MR. LYTTON W. KERNAN
FOR ASSISTANCE TO HER
IN MATTERS OF TECHNIQUE

AN OPEN LETTER

from

THOMAS H. DICKINSON

August 5, 1921

DEAR MISS GALE:

Any foreword that I can write to your play, *Miss Lulu Bett,* must be addressed to you, and others must read it, if at all, over your shoulder. As an artist you are, of course, not interested in definitions, being absorbed rather in always nearer and nearer approximations; but I shall not, on that account, forbear to remark how much your novel, and the play that followed it, have widened the practice of the arts that they represent.

As a matter of fact, if one would understand your novel, one must think of it in terms of dramatic art. It is a commonplace to say that this novel marks a turning point in your art. But perhaps it is not a commonplace to say that if we look back over the road you have traveled we shall find a theater at the crossroads.

Are we then to consider the play in the light of the technique of fiction? By no means! Rather one is filled with wonder that you, an artist heretofore of

the more discursive type, should have out-theatred the theater when you come to practice on its narrow stage. If the theater is an art of condensation here is condensation distilled; if of form, here is form refined and simplified; if of discourse, here is discourse summarized to shorthand. We are told that a true play is like a score for an orchestra; that it is a series of expert notes directed to the conductor and his players. Of no play of recent years is this so truly the case as of *Miss Lulu Bett*. Not here are the spacious character analyses, the circumstantial prescriptions of movements from right to left. And yet in what recent play are characters so silhouette-clear, or are actions so genuinely of the fabric of the fable? Let him who thinks your play a "comedy of words" skip a page or even a speech and see where he finds himself.

As for your two endings,—that is for you to say. Frankly the matter doesn't interest me greatly, for it goes back to the consideration of the drama as a social art, while I, forgetting its dependent state, would prefer to think of it as the product of the free spirit of the writer. I know that I may not so think of a play any more than that you may so write one. But I will not admit that the matter has anything to do with happy versus drab endings, or with the variations in inclination of the curve of Lulu Bett's career. Nor has it anything to do with the relative excellence of this or that. It is concerned entirely with the fact that while as practiced to-day the art of fiction permits to the artist more or less independence in the use of his

imagination, in writing a play he can rarely forget that he is working with a collaborator who at the best perplexes him and at the worst strikes terror to his heart.

Granting, as I do, that you may have two endings I see no reason why you should not have half a dozen if you wish and if circumstances require them. All I ask is that one of these be the ending of your choice. If one of these endings be the artist's own I care not what ending he writes in collaboration. The best thing you have done in offering to the reader your two endings is to show him the documents in the case. To this extent you have taken another step toward that declaration of the independence of dramatic authorship that is sorely needed.

For the craftmanship of your play, for the combined burden and opportunity you give to your producer and to the actors (admirably carried in every respect), for the courage of its refusals, not less than of its manifest innovations, I, with thousands of others, well-wishers for the American theater, am profoundly grateful to you.

THOMAS H. DICKINSON

MILTON, CONN.

FOREWORD

For centuries people in plays have been abnormally distinguished. Theirs has been a peculiar facility for cleverness, virility, or personal charm, which has raised them above the individuals in the audience and made of the theater a place where one goes to experience vicariously the warm glow of uttering an epigram through the mouth of "Lord Goring," the deep satisfaction of romantic relations with a beautiful lady ("Prince Rudolpho" acting as our agent), or the inexpressible relief of having a mortgage lifted through the efforts of young "Tom Cartwright."

If Art is to be held down to one of the many indefinite definitions given to it throughout the ages—that of reflecting life—then the theater has contained but little of Art, for it has been peopled by unnaturally brilliant characters living preposterous lives in a manner so totally removed from life as it is known by the honored members of the public that they have been willing to pay money to witness it as a curiosity.

Especially in its dialogue has the stage clung to an artificiality which even the best of playwrights seem unable to shake off once the blood mounts to their temples and they feel the resiliency of the second act beneath their feet. Statistics could be brought out to

prove that, in an average gathering, the proportion of clever conversationalists to dull though voluble talkers is one to three hundred and twenty-four thousand. And yet almost every play contains at least three in a cast of ten whose repartee is unquestionably intended to be classed as "entertaining."

Even the "old-home" talk of our rural dramas, the line, "Land sakes, ain't them pies done yet?" with which the first act opens, has become, in spite of its affectation of naturalness, so theatrical that whenever we hear a genuine housewife say it in a real kitchen we suspect her of trying to talk like an actress.

Into this babel of artificial dialogue came *Miss Lulu Bett* bearing the revolutionary banner of banality. And under this banner march ninety-nine one-hundredths of American conversationalists. First in her book, and then in her play, Zona Gale discarded the ideal held by writers since Plutarch that their characters must say something unusual, and gave us "Dwight Herbert Deacon" to say the gorgeously conventional thing with epoch-making dullness.

"The baked potato contains more nourishment than potatoes prepared any other way. Roasting retains it," he asserts in the first act.

To which his wife replies: "That's what I always think."

And the white light of truth which bursts forth from this conversational sally discovers Oscar Wilde to be a shining collection of tinsel.

Zona Gale is the first author, to my knowledge, who

has dared to write genuinely dull dialogue. Many writers have achieved dull dialogue under a misapprehension on their parts, and still others have started out with the honest intention of making their characters dull in the interests of veracity. But these latter have sooner or later succumbed to the temptation either of enlarging upon the dullness until it became burlesque or of capitulating entirely and throwing in a clever line simply to keep up the tone of the play.

But Miss Gale saw the truth and has kept it whole. She was depicting uninspired American family life (almost for the first time in our literature) and she held fast to the ideals of American family conversation. In the opening scene of the first act of *Miss Lulu Bett* there is not a single redeeming feature in the remarks made by the Deacon family across the creamed salmon. It is nothing short of magnificent.

"Dwight Herbert" is, of course, the high priest of this elaborate banality, and in his creation Miss Gale has given to America a man made in its own image, something rarely done on our native stage. And, as if this were not enough, she has also brought, whining and scuffling before the footlights, our first normal stage-child, in the unpleasing person of the recalcitrant "Monona." For years we have seen no small children on the stage who did not spend their time coming downstairs in their nighties to reunite uncongenial parents or bringing tears to the hard eyes of adventuresses by telling them that they looked "des like muvver." It was with the full force of an original dramatic creation

therefore that "Monona Deacon," the world's most disagreeable stage-child, came swimming petulantly into our ken. She and her disillusioned "Grandma Bett" (a character somewhat more generic as acted but no less vivid), with their joint and articulate hatred of the rest of the family, constitute a refreshing rearrangement of the hitherto idyllic characters of Childhood and Old Age.

In the interests of truth, then, Miss Gale has violated many sacred dramatic rules. She has given us characters who talk as people really talk and who therefore are dull. She has given us an old lady who is not sweet, and a child who is not cute. And, on the technical side, she has begun two successive scenes with practically the same dialogue, so that for several minutes one is scarcely distinct from the other. And in this last deviation from established custom she has at one stroke succeeded in creating an atmosphere of monotony and domestic routine in home life which stands unique among theatrical effects.

The result of such adherence to uninspiring reality might well have been expected to be a failure in its appeal to an uninspiring nation of theater-goers. But Miss Gale took the chance. She wrote the play, as she had written the book, without compromise, and was rewarded by an enthusiastic public.

ROBERT C. BENCHLEY

THE CAST

As produced and staged by Mr. Brock Pemberton beginning December 27, 1920, at the Belmont Theatre, New York.

MONONA DEACON.....*Lois Shore*
DWIGHT HERBERT DEACON.....*William Holden*
INA DEACON .....*Catherine Calhoun Doucet*
LULU BETT..... .....*Carroll McComas*
BOBBY LARKIN.....*Jack Bohn*
MRS. BETT.....*Louis Closser Hale*
DIANA DEACON..... .....*Beth Varden*
NEIL CORNISH.....*Willard Robertson*
NINIAN DEACON.....*Brigham Royce*

TIME: *The Present* PLACE: *The Middle Class*

ACT I.—*Scene* 1.—The Deacon's dining-room.
Scene 2.—The same; ten days later.
ACT II.—*Scene* 1.—The Deacon's front porch; a month later.
Scene 2.—The same; the following evening.
Scene 3.—The same; a fortnight later.
ACT III.—(*2d version*)—The Deacon's front porch. A morning later.
(*1st version*)—Cornish's music store; the following morning.

Between the scenes in Acts I and II the curtain will be lowered a half a minute to indicate the lapse of time.

MISS LULU BETT

ACT I

SCENE I

THE DEACON DINING ROOM: *Plain rose paper, oak sideboard, straight chairs, a soft old brown divan, table laid for supper. Large pictures of, say, "Paul and Virginia" and Abbott Thayer's "Motherhood." A door left leads to kitchen; a door right front leads to the passage and the "other" room. Back are two windows with lace curtains, revealing shrubbery or blossoming plants; and a shelf with a clock and a photograph of Ninian Deacon. Over the table is a gas burner in a glass globe. In the center of the table is a pink tulip in a pot. The stage is empty.*

[*Enter* MONONA. *She tiptoes to the table, tastes a dish or two, hides a cooky in her frock; begins a terrible little chant on miscellaneous notes.*]

[*Enter* DWIGHT DEACON.]

DWIGHT

What! You don't mean you're in time for supper, baby?

MONONA

I ain't a baby.

DWIGHT

Ain't. Ain't. Ain't.

MONONA

Well, I ain't.

DWIGHT

We shall have to take you in hand, mama and I,
We shall-have-to-take-you in hand.

MONONA

I ain't such a bad girl.

DWIGHT

Ain't. Ain't. Ain't.

[*Enter* INA, *Door R. E.*]

INA

Dwightie! Have I kept you waiting?

DWIGHT

It's all right, my pet. Bear and forbear. Bear and forbear.

INA

Everything's on the table. I didn't hear Lulu call us, though. She's fearfully careless. And Dwight, she looks so bad—when there's company I hate to have her around.

[*They seat themselves.*]

DWIGHT

My dear Ina, your sister is very different from you.

INA

Well, Lulu certainly is a trial. Come Monona.

DWIGHT

Live and let live, my dear. We have to overlook, you know. What have we on the festive board to-night?

INA

We have creamed salmon. On toast.

MONONA

I don't want any.

DWIGHT

What's this? *No* salmon?

MONONA

No.

INA

Oh now, pet! You liked it before.

MONONA

I don't want any.

DWIGHT

Just a little? A very little? What is this? Progeny will not eat?

INA

She can eat if she will eat. The trouble is, she will *not* take the time.

DWIGHT

She don't put her mind on her meals.

INA

Now, pettie, you must eat or you'll get sick.

MONONA

I don't want any.

INA

Well, pettie—then how would you like a nice egg?

MONONA

No.

INA

Some bread and milk?

MONONA

No.

[*Enter* LULU BETT. *She carries a plate of muffins.*]

INA

Lulu, Monona won't eat a thing. I should think you might think of something to fix for her.

LULU

Can't I make her a little milk toast?

MONONA

Yes!

INA

Well now, sister. Don't toast it too much. That last was too—and it's no use, she will *not* eat it if it's burned.

LULU

I won't burn it on purpose.

INA

Well, see that you don't . . . Lulu! Which milk are you going to take?

LULU

The bottle that sets in front, won't I?

INA

But that's yesterday's milk. No, take the fresh bottle from over back. Monona must be nourished.

LULU

But then the yesterday's'll sour and I can't make a custard pie——

DWIGHT

Kindly settle these domestic matters without bringing them to my attention at meal time.

[*Observes the tulip.*]

Flowers! Who's been having flowers sent in?

INA

Ask Lulu.

DWIGHT

Suitors?

LULU

It was a quarter. There'll be five flowers.

DWIGHT

You bought it?

LULU

Yes. Five flowers. That's a nickel apiece.

DWIGHT

Yet we give you a home on the supposition that you have no money to spend, even for the necessities.

INA

Well, but Dwightie. Lulu isn't strong enough to work. What's the use——

DWIGHT

The justice business and the dental profession do not warrant the purchase of spring flowers in my home.

INA

Well, but Dwightie——

DWIGHT

No more. Lulu meant no harm.

INA

The back bottle, Lulu. And be as quick as you can. Remember, the back bottle. She has a terrible

will, hangs on to her own ideas, and hangs on——
[*Exit* LULU.]

DWIGHT

Forbearance my pet, forbearance. Baked potatoes. That's good—that's good. The baked potato contains more nourishment than potatoes prepared in any other way. Roasting retains it.

INA

That's what I always think.

DWIGHT

Where's your mother? Isn't she coming to supper?

INA

No. Tantrim.

DWIGHT

Oh ho, mama has a tantrim, eh? My dear Ina, your mother is getting old. She don't have as many clear-headed days as she did.

INA

Mama's mind is just as good as it ever was, sometimes.

DWIGHT

Hadn't I better call her up?

INA

You know how mama is.

[*Enter* LULU. *She takes flowerpot from table and throws it out the window. Exit* LULU.]

DWIGHT

I'd better see.

[*Goes to door and opens it.*]

Mother Bett! . . . Come and have some supper. . . . Looks to me Lulu's muffins'd go down pretty easy! Come on—I had something funny to tell you and Ina. . . .

[*Returns.*]

No use. She's got a tall one on to-night, evidently. What's the matter with her?

INA

Well, I told Lulu to put the creamed salmon on the new blue platter, and mama thought I ought to use the old deep dish.

DWIGHT

You reminded her that you are mistress here in your own home? But gently, I hope?

INA

Well—I reminded her. She said if I kept on using the best dishes I wouldn't have a cup left for my own wake.

DWIGHT

And my little puss insisted?

INA

Why of course. I wanted to have the table look nice for you, didn't I?

DWIGHT

My precious pussy.

INA

So then she walked off to her room.

[MONONA *sings her terrible little chant.*]

Quiet, pettie, quiet!

DWIGHT

Softly, softly, *softly,* SOFTLY! . . . Well, here we are, aren't we? I tell you people don't know what living is if they don't belong in a little family circle.

INA

That's what I always think.

DWIGHT

Just coming home here and sort of settling down—it's worth more than a tonic at a dollar the bottle. Look at this room. See this table. Could anything be pleasanter?

INA

Monona! Now, it's all over both ruffles. And mama does try so hard. . . .

DWIGHT

My dear. Can't you put your mind on the occasion?

INA

Well, but Monona *is* so messy.

DWIGHT

Women can*not* generalize.

[*Clock strikes half hour.*]

Curious how that clock loses. It must be fully quarter to. It is quarter to! I'm pretty good at guessing time.

INA

I've often noticed that.

DWIGHT

That clock is a terrible trial. Last night it was only twenty-three after when the half hour struck.

INA

Twenty-one I thought.

DWIGHT

Twenty-three. My dear Ina, didn't I particularly notice. It was twenty-three.

MONONA

[*Like lightning.*]

I want my milk toast, I want my milk toast, I want my milk toast.

INA

Do hurry, sister. She's going to get nervous.

[MONONA *chants her chant. Enter* LULU.]

LULU

I've got the toast here.

INA

Did you burn it?

LULU

Not black.

DWIGHT

There we are. Milk toast like a ku-ween. Where is our young lady daughter to-night?

INA

She's at Jenny Plows, at a teaparty.

DWIGHT

Oh ho, teaparty. Is it?

LULU

We told you that this noon.

DWIGHT

[*Frowning at* LULU.]
How much is salmon the can now, Ina?

INA

How much is it, Lulu?

LULU

The large ones are forty, that used to be twenty-five. And the small ones that were ten, they're twenty-five. The butter's about all gone. Shall I wait for the butter woman or get some creamery?

DWIGHT

Not at meal time, if you please, Lulu. The conversation at my table must not deal with domestic matters.

LULU

I suppose salmon made me think of butter.

DWIGHT

There is not the remotest connection. Salmon comes from a river. Butter comes from a cow. A cow bears no relation to a river. A cow may drink from a river, she may do that, but I doubt if that was in your mind when you spoke—you're not that subtle.

LULU

No, that wasn't in my mind.

[*Enter* MOTHER BETT.]

DWIGHT

Well, Mama Bett, hungry now?

MRS. BETT

No, I'm not hungry.

INA

We put a potato in the oven for you, mama.

MRS. BETT

No, I thank you.

DWIGHT

And a muffin, Mama Bett.

MRS. BETT

No, I thank you.

LULU

Mama, can't I fix you some fresh tea?

MRS. BETT

That's right, Lulie. You're a good girl. And see that you put in enough tea so as a body can taste tea part of the way down.

INA

Sit here with us, mama.

MRS. BETT

No, I thank you. I'll stand and keep my figger.

DWIGHT

You know you look like a queen when you stand up, straight back, high head, a regular wonder for your years, you are.

MRS. BETT

Sometimes I think you try to flatter me.

[*Sits.*]

[*Doorbell.*]

MONONA

I'll go. I'll go. Let me go.

DWIGHT

Now what can anybody be thinking of to call just at meal time. Can't I even have a quiet supper with my family without the outside world clamoring?

LULU

Maybe that's the butter woman.

DWIGHT

Lulu, no more about the butter, please.

MONONA

Come on in. Here's Bobby to see you, papa, let's feed him.

DWIGHT

Oh ho! So I'm the favored one. Then draw up to the festive board, Robert. A baked potato?

BOBBY

No, sir. I—I wanted something else.

DWIGHT

What's this? Came to see the justice about getting married, did you? Or the dentist to have your tooth pulled—eh? Same thing—eh, Ina? Ha! ha! ha!

BOBBY

I—I wondered whether—I thought if you would give me a job. . . .

DWIGHT

So that's it.

BOBBY

I thought maybe I might cut the grass or cut—cut something.

DWIGHT

My boy, every man should cut his own grass. Every man should come home at night, throw off his coat and, in his vigor, cut his own grass.

BOBBY

Yes, sir.

DWIGHT

Exercise, exercise is next to bread—next to gluten. Hold on, though—hold on. After dental hours I want to begin presently to work my garden. I have two lots. Property is a burden. Suppose you cut the grass on the one lot through the spring.

BOBBY

Good enough, sir. Can I start right in now? It isn't dark yet.

DWIGHT

That's right, that's right. Energy—it's the driving power of the nation.

[*They rise,* DWIGHT *goes toward the door with* BOBBY.]

Start right in, by all means. You'll find the mower in the shed, oiled and ready. Tools always ready —that's my motto, my boy.

[*Enter* DI *and* CORNISH. CORNISH *carries many favors.*]

Ah ha!

DI

Where is everybody ? Oh, hullo, Bobby! You came to see me?

BOBBY

Oh, hullo! No. I came to see your father.

DI

Did you? Well, there he is. Look at him.

BOBBY

You don't need to tell me where to look or what to do. Good-by. I'll find the mower, Mr. Deacon. [*Exit.*]

DWIGHT

Mama! What do you s'pose? Di thought she had a beau— How are you, Cornish?

DI

Oh, papa! Why, I just hate Bobby Larkin, and the whole school knows it. Mama, wasn't Mr. Cornish nice to help carry my favors?

INA

Ah, Mr. Cornish! You see what a popular little girl we have.

CORNISH

Yes, I suppose so. That is—isn't that remarkable, Mrs. Deacon?

[*He tries to greet* LULU, *who is clearing the table.*]

DI

Oh, papa, the sweetest party—and the dearest supper and the darlingest decorations and the georgeousest—— Monona, let go of me!

DWIGHT

Children, children, can't we have peace in this house?

MONONA

Ah, you'll catch it for talking so smarty.

DI

Oh, will I?

INA

Monona, don't stand listening to older people. Run around and play.

[MONONA *runs a swift circle and returns to her attitude of listener.*]

CORNISH

Pardon me—this is Miss Bett, isn't it?

LULU

I—Lulu Bett, yes.

CORNISH

I had the pleasure of meeting you the night I was here for supper.

LULU

I didn't think you'd remember.

CORNISH

Don't you think I'd remember that meat pie?

LULU

Oh, yes. The meat pie. You might remember the meat pie.

[*Exit, carrying plates.*]

CORNISH

What in the dickens did I say that for?

INA

Oh, Lulu likes it. She's a wonderful cook. I don't know what we should do without her.

DWIGHT

A most exemplary woman is Lulu.

INA

That's eggsemplary, Dwightie.

DWIGHT

My darling little dictionary.

DI

Mama, Mr. Cornish and I have promised to go back to help Jenny.

INA

How nice! And Mr. Cornish, do let us see you oftener.

DWIGHT

Yes, yes, Cornish. Drop in. Any time, you know.

CORNISH

I'll be glad to come. I do get pretty lonesome evenings.
[*Enter* LULU, *clearing table.*]
I eat out around. I guess that's why your cooking made such an impression on me, Miss Lulu.

LULU

Yes. Yes. I s'pose it would take something like that. . . .

CORNISH

Oh, no, no! I didn't mean—you mustn't think I meant— What'd I say that for?

LULU

Don't mind. They always say that to me.
[*Exit with dishes.*]

DI

Come on, Mr. Cornish. Jenny'll be waiting. Monona, let *go* of me!

MONONA

I don't want you!

DWIGHT

Early, darling, early! Get her back here early, Mr. Cornish.

CORNISH

Oh, I'll have her back here as soon as ever she'll come —well, ah—I mean. . . .

DI

Good-by Dwight and Ina!

[*Exit* DI *and* CORNISH.]

DWIGHT

Nice fellow, nice fellow. Don't know whether he'll make a go of his piano store, but he's studying law evenings.

INA

But we don't know anything about him, Dwight. A stranger so.

DWIGHT

On the contrary I know a great deal about him. I know that he has a little inheritance coming to him.

INA

An inheritance—really? I *thought* he was from a good family.

DWIGHT

My mercenary little pussy.

INA

Well, if he comes here so very much you know what we may expect.

DWIGHT

What may we expect?

INA

He'll fall in love with Di. And a young girl is awfully flattered when a good-looking older man pays her attention. Haven't you noticed that?

DWIGHT

How women generalize! My dear Ina, I have other matters to notice.

INA

Monona. Stop listening! Run about and play.

[MONONA *runs her circle and returns.*]

Well, look at that clock. It's almost your bedtime, anyway.

[*Enter* LULU.]

MONONA

No.

INA

It certainly is.

MONONA

That clock's wrong. Papa said so.

INA

Mama says bedtime. In ten minutes.

MONONA

I won't go all night.

DWIGHT

Daughter, daughter, daughter. . . .

MONONA

I won't go for a week.

[DWIGHT *sees on clock shelf a letter.*]

INA

Oh, Dwight! It came this morning. I forgot.

LULU

I forgot too. And I laid it up there.

DWIGHT

Isn't it understood that my mail can't wait like this?

LULU

I know. I'm sorry. But you hardly ever get a letter.

DWIGHT

Of course pressing matters go to my office. Still my mail should have more careful——

[*He reads.*]

Now! What do you think I have to tell you?

INA

Oh, Dwightie! Something nice?

DWIGHT

That depends. I'll like it. So'll Lulu. It's company.

MONONA

I hope they bring me something decent.

INA

Oh, Dwight, who?

DWIGHT

My brother, from Oregon.

INA

Ninian coming here?

DWIGHT

Some day next week. He don't know what a charmer Lulu is or he'd come quicker.

INA

Dwight, it's been years since you've seen him.

DWIGHT

Nineteen—twenty. Must be twenty.

INA

And he's never seen me.

DWIGHT

Nor Lulu.

INA

And think where he's been. South America—Mexico —Panama and all. We must put it in the paper.

MRS. BETT

Who's coming? Why don't you say who's coming? You all act so dumb.

LULU

It's Dwight's brother, mother. His brother from Oregon.

MRS. BETT

Never heard of him.

LULU

[*Taking photograph from shelf.*]

That one, mother. You've dusted his picture lots of times.

MRS. BETT

That? Got to have him around long?

DWIGHT

I don't know. Wait till he sees Lulu. I expect when he sees Lulu you can't drive him away. He's going to take one look at Lulu and settle down here for life. He's going to think Lulu is——

LULU

I—think the tea must be steeped now.

[*Exit.*]

DWIGHT

He's going to think Lulu is a stunner—a stunner. . . .

[*The clock strikes.* MONONA *shrieks.*]

Is the progeny hurt?

INA

Bedtime. Now, Monona, be mama's nice little lady. . . . Monona, quiet, pettie, quiet. . . .

[LULU *enters with tea and toast.*]

Lulu, won't you take her to bed? You know Dwight and I are going to Study Club.

LULU

There, mother. Yes. I'll take her to bed. Come, Monona. And stop that noise instantly.

[MONONA *stops. As they cross* DWIGHT *spies the tulip on* LULU'S *gown.*]

DWIGHT

Lulu. One moment. You *picked* the flower on the plant?

LULU

Yes. I—picked it.

DWIGHT

She buys a hothouse plant and then ruins it!

LULU

I—I——

[*She draws* MONONA *swiftly left; exeunt; the door slams.*]

DWIGHT

What a pity Lulu hasn't your manners, pettie.

MRS. BETT

What do you care? She's got yours.

DWIGHT

Mother Bett! Fare thee well.

MRS. BETT

How do you stand him? The lump!

INA

Mama dear, now drink your tea. Good-night, sweetie.

MRS. BETT

You needn't think I forgot about the platter, because I ain't. Of all the extravagant doin's, courtin' the poorhouse——

[*Exeunt* DWIGHT *and* INA. MRS. BETT *continues to look after them, her lips moving. At door appears* BOBBY.]

BOBBY

Where's Mr. Deacon?

MRS. BETT

Gone, thank the Lord!

BOBBY

I've got the grass cut.

MRS. BETT

You act like it was a trick.

BOBBY

Is—is everybody gone?

MRS. BETT

Who's this you're talkin' to?

BOBBY

Yes, well, I meant—I guess I'll go now.

[*Enter* DI.]

DI

Well, Bobby Larkin. Are you cutting grass in the dining room?

BOBBY

No, ma'am, I was not cutting grass in the dining room. [*Enter* LULU, *collects her mother's dishes, folds cloth and watches.*]

DI

I used to think you were pretty nice, but I don't like you any more.

BOBBY

Yes you used to! Is that why you made fun of me all the time?

DI

I had to. They all were teasing me about you.

BOBBY

They were? Teasing you about me?

DI

I had to make them stop so I teased you. I never wanted to.

BOBBY

Well, I never thought it was anything like that.

DI

Of course you didn't. I—wanted to tell you.

BOBBY

You wanted——

DI

Of course I did. You must go now—they're hearing us.

BOBBY

Say——

DI

Good-night. Go the back way, Bobby—you nice thing.
[*Exit* BOBBY.]
Aunt Lulu, give me the cookies, please, and the apples. Mr. Cornish is on the front porch . . . mama and papa won't be home till late, will they?

LULU

I don't think so.

DI

Well, I'll see to the hall light. Don't you bother. Good-night.

LULU

Good-night, Di.
[*Exit* DI.]

MRS. BETT

My land! How she wiggles and chitters.

LULU

Mother, could you hear them? Di and Bobby Larkin?

MRS. BETT

Mother hears a-plenty.

LULU

How easy she done it . . . got him right over . . . how did she do that?

MRS. BETT

Di wiggles and chitters.

LULU

It was just the other day I taught her to sew . . . I wonder if Ina knows.

MRS. BETT

What's the use of you findin' fault with Inie? Where'd you been if she hadn't married I'd like to know? . . . What say? . . . eh? . . . I'm goin' to bed. . . . You always was jealous of Inie.

[*Exit* MRS. BETT.]

[LULU *crosses to shelf, takes down photograph of* NINIAN DEACON, *holds it, looks at it.*]

CURTAIN

Scene II

Same set. *Late afternoon. A week later. The table is cleared of dishes, and has an oilcloth cover.* Bobby *is discovered outside the window, on whose sill* Di *is sitting.*

Bobby

So you despise me for cutting grass?

Di

No, I don't. But if you're going to be a great man why don't you get started at it?

Bobby

I am started at it—inside. But it don't earn me a cent yet.

Di

Bobby, Bobby! I know you're great now, don't you ever think I don't, but I want everybody else to know.

Bobby

Di, when you said that it sounded just like a—a you know.

Di

Like what?

Bobby

Like a wife. Gee, what a word that is!

DI

Isn't it? It's ever so much more exciting word than husband.

[*Enter* LULU, *followed by* MONONA. LULU *carries bowl, pan of apples, paring knife.* MONONA *carries basket of apples and a towel. As* LULU *rattles dishes,* DI *turns, sees* LULU. BOBBY *disappears from window.*]

DI

There's never any privacy in this house.

[*Exit* DI.]

LULU

Hurry, Monona, I must make the pies before I get dinner. Now wipe every one.

MONONA

What for?

LULU

To make the pies.

MONONA

What do you want to make pies for?

LULU

To eat.

MONONA

What do you want to eat for?

LULU

To grow strong—and even sensible.

MONONA

It's no fun asking you a string of questions. You never get mad. Mama gets good and mad. So does papa.

LULU

Then why do you ask them questions?

MONONA

Oh, I like to get them going.

LULU

Monona!

MONONA

I told mama I didn't pass, just so I could hear her.

LULU

Why, Monona!

MONONA

Then when I told her I did pass, she did it again. When she's mad she makes awful funny faces.

LULU

You love her, don't you, Monona?

MONONA

I love her best when there's company. If there was always company, I'd always love her. Isn't she sweet before Uncle Ninian though?

LULU

I—I don't know. Monona, you mustn't talk so.

MONONA

He's been here a week and mama hasn't been cross once. Want to know what he said about you?

LULU

I—did he—did he say anything about me?

MONONA

He told papa you were the best cook he'd ever ate. Said he'd et a good many.

LULU

The cooking. It's always the cooking.

MONONA

He said some more, but I can't remember.

LULU

Monona, what else did he say?

MONONA

I don't know.

LULU

Try. . . .

MONONA

Here he is now. Ask him to his face. Hullo, Uncle Ninian! Good-by.

[*Exit* MONONA. *Enter* NINIAN.]

NINIAN

Hello, kitten! Ask him what? What do you want to ask him?

LULU

I—I think I was wondering what kind of pies you like best.

NINIAN

That's easy. I like your kind of pies best. The best ever. Every day since I've been here I've seen you baking, Mrs. Bett.

LULU

Yes, I—bake. What did you call me then?

NINIAN

Mrs. Bett—isn't it? Every one says just Lulu, but I took it for granted. . . . Well, now—is it Mrs.? or Miss Lulu Bett?

LULU

It's Miss. . . . From choice.

NINIAN

You bet! Oh, you bet! Never doubted that.

LULU

What kind of a Mr. are you?

NINIAN

Never give myself away. Say, by George, I never thought of that before. There's no telling whether a man's married or not, by his name.

LULU

It doesn't matter.

NINIAN

Why?

LULU

Not so many people want to know.

NINIAN

Say, you're pretty good, aren't you?

LULU

If I am it never took me very far.

NINIAN

Where you been mostly?

LULU

Here. I've always been here. Fifteen years with Ina. Before that we lived in the country.

NINIAN

Never been anywhere much?

LULU

Never been anywhere at all.

NINIAN

H . . . m. Well, I want to tell you something about yourself.

LULU

About me?

NINIAN

Something that I'll bet you don't even know. It's this: I think you have it pretty hard around here.

LULU

Oh, no!

NINIAN

See here. Do you have to work like this all the time? I guess you won't mind my asking.

LULU

But I ought to work. I have a home with them. Mother too.

NINIAN

But glory! You ought to have some kind of a life of your own.

LULU

How could I do that?

NINIAN

A man don't even know what he's like till he's roamed around on his own. . . . Roamed around on his own. Course a woman don't understand that.

LULU

Why don't she? Why don't she?

NINIAN

Do you?

[LULU *nods.*]

I've had twenty-five years of galloping about—Brazil, Mexico, Panama.

LULU

My!

NINIAN

It's the life.

LULU

Must be. I——

NINIAN

Yes, you. Why, you've never had a thing! I guess you don't know how it seems to me, coming along —a stranger so. I don't like it.

LULU

They're very good to me.

NINIAN

Do you know why you think that? Because you've never had anybody really good to you. That's why.

LULU

But they treat me good.

NINIAN

They make a slavey of you. Regular slavey. Damned shame *I* call it.

LULU

But we have our whole living——

NINIAN

And you earn it. I been watching you ever since I've been here. Don't you ever go anywhere?

LULU

Oh, no, I don't go anywhere. I——

NINIAN

Lord! Don't you want to? Of course you do.

LULU

Of course I'd like to get clear away—or I used to want to.

NINIAN

Say—you've been a blamed fine-looking woman.

LULU

You must have been a good-looking man once yourself.

NINIAN

You're pretty good. I don't see how you do it—darned if I do.

LULU

How I do what?

NINIAN

Why come back, quick like that, with what you say. You don't look it.

LULU

It must be my grand education.

NINIAN

Education: I ain't never had it and I ain't never missed it.

LULU

Most folks are happy without an education.

NINIAN

You're not very happy, though.

LULU

Oh, no.

NINIAN

Well you ought to get up and get out of here—find—find some work you *like* to do.

LULU

But, you see, I can't do any other work—that's the trouble—women like me can't do any other work.

NINIAN

But you make this whole house go round.

LULU

If I do, nobody knows it.

NINIAN

I know it. I hadn't been in the house twenty-four hours till I knew it.

LULU

You did? You thought that. . . . Yes, well if I do I hate making it go round.

NINIAN

See here—couldn't you tell me a little bit about—what you'd *like* to do? If you had your own way?

LULU

I don't know—now.

NINIAN

What did you ever think you'd like to do?

LULU

Take care of folks that needed me. I—I mean sick folks or old folks or—like that. Take *care* of them. Have them—have them want me.

NINIAN

By George! You're a wonder.

LULU

Am I? Ask Dwight.

NINIAN

Dwight. I could knock the top of his head off the way he speaks to you. I'd like to see you get out of this, I certainly would.

LULU

I can't get out. I'll never get out—now.

NINIAN

Don't keep saying "now" like that. You—you put me out of business, darned if you don't.

LULU

Oh, I don't mean to feel sorry for myself—you stop making me feel sorry for myself!

NINIAN

I know one thing—I'm going to give Dwight Deacon a chunk of my mind.

LULU

Oh, no! no! no! I wouldn't want you to do that. Thank you.

NINIAN

Well, somebody ought to do something. See here—while I'm staying around you know you've got a friend in me, don't you?

LULU

Do I?

NINIAN

You bet you do.

LULU

Not just my cooking?

NINIAN

Oh, come now—why, I liked you the first moment I saw you.

LULU

Honest?

NINIAN

Go on—go on. Did you like me?

LULU

Now you're just being polite.

NINIAN

Say, I wish there was some way——

LULU

Don't you bother about me.

NINIAN

I wish there was some way——

[MONONA'S *voice chants.*]

[*Enter* MONONA.]

MONONA

You've had him long enough, Aunt Lulu—— Can't you pay me some 'tention?

NINIAN

Come here. Give us a kiss. My stars, what a great big tall girl! Have to put a board on her head to stop this growing.

MONONA

[*Seeing diamond.*]

What's that?

NINIAN

That diamond came from Santa Claus. He has a jewelry shop in heaven. I have twenty others like this one. I keep the others to wear on the Sundays when the sun comes up in the west.

MONONA

Does the sun ever come up in the west?

NINIAN

Sure—on my honor. Some day I'm going to melt a diamond and eat it. Then you sparkle all over in the dark, ever after. I'm going to plant one too, some day. Then you can grow a diamond vine. Yes, on my honor.

LULU

Don't do that—don't do that.

NINIAN

What?

LULU

To her. That's lying.

NINIAN

Oh, no. That's not lying. That's just drama. Drama. Do you like going to a good show?

LULU

I've never been to any—only those that come here.

NINIAN

Think of that now. Don't you ever go to the city?

LULU

I haven't been in six years and over.

NINIAN

Well, sir, I'll tell you what I'm going to do with you. While I'm here I'm going to take you and Ina and Dwight up to the city, to see a show.

LULU

Oh, you don't want me to go.

NINIAN

Yes, sir, I'll give you one good time. Dinner and a show.

LULU

Ina and Dwight do that sometimes. I can't imagine me.

NINIAN

Well, you're coming with me. I'll look up something good. And you tell me just what you like to eat and we'll order it——

LULU

It's been years since I've eaten anything that I haven't cooked myself.

NINIAN

It has. Say, by George! why shouldn't we go to the city *to-night*.

LULU

To-night?

NINIAN

Yes. If Dwight and Ina will. It's early yet. What do you say?

LULU

You sure you want me to go? Why—I don't know whether I've got anything I could wear.

NINIAN

Sure you have.

LULU

I—yes, I have. I could wear the waist I always thought they'd use—if I died.

NINIAN

Sure you could wear that. Just the thing. And throw some things in a bag—it'll be too late to come back to-night. Now don't you back out. . . .

LULU

Oh, the pies——

NINIAN

Forget the pies—well, no, I wouldn't say that. But hustle them up.

LULU

Oh, maybe Ina wont go. . . .

NINIAN

Leave Ina to me.

[*Exit* NINIAN.]

LULU

Mother, mother! Monona, put the rest of those apples back in the basket and carry them out.

MONONA

Yes, Aunt Lulu.

LULU

I can't get ready. They'll leave me behind. Mother! Hurry, Monona. We mustn't leave such a looking house. Mother! Monona, don't you drop those apples.

[MONONA *drops them all.*]

My heavens, my pies aren't in the oven yet.

[*Enter* MRS. BETT.]

MRS. BETT

Who wants their mother?

LULU

Mother, please pick up these things for me—quick.

MRS. BETT

[*Leisurely*]

What is the rush, Lulie?

LULU

Mother, Mr. Deacon—Ninian, you know—wants Ina and Dwight and me to go to the theater to-night in the city.

MRS. BETT

Does, does he? Well, you mind me, Lulie, and go on. It'll do you good.

LULU

Yes, mother. I will.

[*Exit with pies.*]

MRS. BETT

No need breaking everybody's neck off, though, as I know of. Monona, get out from under my feet.

MONONA

Grandma, compared between what I am, you are nothing.

MRS. BETT

What do you mean—little ape?

MONONA

It's no fun to get you going. You're too easy, grandma dear!

[*Exit. Enter* NINIAN.]

NINIAN

All right—Dwight and Ina are game. Oh, Mrs. Bett! Won't you come to the theater with us to-night?

MRS. BETT

No. I'm fooled enough without fooling myself on purpose. But Lulie can go.

NINIAN

You don't let her go too much, do you, Mrs. Bett?

MRS. BETT

Well, I ain't never let her go to the altar if that's what you mean.

NINIAN

Don't you think she'd be better off?

MRS. BETT

Wouldn't make much difference. Why look at me. A' husband, six children, four of 'em under the sod with him. And sometimes I feel as though nothin' more had happened to me than has happened to Lulie. It's all gone. For me just the same as for her. Only she ain't had the pain. [*Yawns.*]

What was I talkin' about just then?

NINIAN

Why—why—er, we were talking about going to the theater.

MRS. BETT

Going to the theater, are you?

[*Enter* LULU.]

NINIAN

It's all right, Miss Lulu. They'll go—both of them. Dwight is telephoning for the seats.

LULU

I was wondering why you should be so kind to me.

NINIAN

Kind? Why, this is for my own pleasure, Miss Lulu. That's what I think of mostly.

LULU

But just see. It's so wonderful. Half an hour ago I never thought I'd be going to the city now—with you all. . . .

NINIAN

I'm an impulsive cuss you'll find, Miss Lulu.

LULU

But this is so wonderful. . . .

[*Enter* INA.]

Ina, isn't it beautiful that we're going?

INA

Oh, are you going?

NINIAN

Of course she's going. Great snakes, why not?

INA

Only that Lulu never goes anywhere.

NINIAN

Whose fault is that?

LULU

Just habit. Pure habit.

NINIAN

Pure cussedness somewhere. Miss Lulu, now you go and get ready and Ina and I'll finish straightening up here.

LULU

Oh, I'll finish.

NINIAN

Go and get ready. I want to see that waist.

LULU

Oh, but I don't need to go yet——

NINIAN

Ina, you tell her to go——

INA

Well, but Lulu, you aren't going to bother to change your dress, are you? You can slip something on over.

LULU

If you think this would do——

NINIAN

It will not do. Not for my party!

[*Shuts the door upon her.*]

INA

How in the world did you ever get Lulu to go, Ninian? *We* never did.

NINIAN

It was very simple. I invited her.

INA

Oh, you mean——

NINIAN

I invited her.

[*Doorbell rings.*]

Shall I answer it?

INA

Will you, please?

[*Exit* NINIAN.

Mother, have you seen Di anywhere?

MRS. BETT

I ain't done nothing but see her.

[*Motions to window.*]

INA

[*At window.*]

Forevermore. That Larkin boy again. Di! Diana Deacon! Come here at once.

DI'S VOICE

Yes, mama.

[*At window.*]

Want me?

INA

I want you to stop making a spectacle of *me* before the neighborhood.

DI

Of *you!*

INA

Certainly. What will people think of me if they see you talking with Robert Larkin the whole afternoon?

DI

We weren't thinking about you, mummy.

INA

No. You never do think about me. Nobody thinks about me. And mama does try so hard——

DI

Oh, mama, I've heard you say that fifty hundred times.

INA

And what impression does it make? None. . . . Nobody listens to me. Nobody.

[*Enter* NINIAN *and* CORNISH.]

NINIAN

All right to bring him in here?

INA

Oh, Mr. Cornish! how very nice to see you.

CORNISH

Good afternoon, Mrs. Deacon. How are you, Miss Di?

NINIAN

I've just been asking Mr. Cornish if he won't join us to-night for dinner and the show.

INA

Oh, Mr. Cornish, do—we'd be so glad.

CORNISH

Why, why, if that wouldn't be——

NINIAN

You're invited, Di, you know.

DI

Me? Oh, how heavenly! Oh, but I've an engagement with Bobby——

INA

But I'm sure you'd break that to go with Uncle Ninian and Mr. Cornish.

DI

Well, I'd break it to go to the theater——

INA

Why, Di Deacon!

DI

Oh, of course to go with Uncle Ninian and Mr. Cornish.

CORNISH

This is awfully good of you. I dropped in because I got so lonesome I didn't know what else to do—that is, I mean. . . .

NINIAN

We get it. We get it.

INA

We'd love to see you any time, Mr. Cornish. Now if you'll excuse Di and me one minute.

DI

Uncle Ninian, you're a lamb.

[*Exeunt* DI *and* INA.]

MRS. BETT

I'm just about the same as I was.

CORNISH

What—er—oh, Mrs. Bett, I didn't see you.

MRS. BETT

I don't complain. But it wouldn't turn my head if some of you spoke to me once in a while. Say—can you tell me what these folks are up to?

CORNISH

Up to . . . up to?

MRS. BETT

Yes. They're all stepping round here, up to something. I don't know what.

NINIAN

Why, Mrs. Bett, we're going to the city to the theater, you know.

MRS. BETT

Well, why didn't you say so?

[*Enter* DWIGHT.]

DWIGHT

Ha! Everybody ready? Well, well, well, well. How are you, Cornish? You going too, Ina says.

CORNISH

Yes, I thought I might as well. I mean——

DWIGHT

That's right, that's right. Mama Bett. Look here!

MRS. BETT

What's that?

DWIGHT

Ice cream—it's *ice* cream. Who is it sits home and has *ice* cream put in her lap like a ku-ween?

MRS. BETT

Vanilly or chocolate?

DWIGHT

Chocolate, Mama Bett.

MRS. BETT

Vanilly sets better. . . . I'll put it in the ice chest—I *may* eat it.

[*Takes spoon from sideboard. Exit.* CORNISH *goes with her.*]

DWIGHT

Where's the lovely Lulu?

NINIAN

She'll be here directly.

DWIGHT

Now what I want to know, Nin, is how you've hypnotized the lovely Lulu into this thing.

NINIAN

Into going? Dwight, I'll tell you about that. I asked her to go with us. Do you get it? I invited the woman.

DWIGHT

Ah, but with a way—with a way. She's never been anywhere like this with us. . . . Well, Nin, how does it seem to see me settled down into a respectable married citizen in my own town—eh?

NINIAN

Oh—you seem just like yourself.

DWIGHT

Yes, yes. I don't change much. Don't feel a day older than I ever did.

NINIAN

And you don't act it.

DWIGHT

Eh, you wouldn't think it to look at us, but our aunt had her hands pretty full bringing us up. Nin, we must certainly run up state and see Aunt Mollie while you're here. She isn't very well.

NINIAN

I don't know whether I'll have time or not.

DWIGHT

Nin, I love that woman. She's an angel. When I think of her I feel—I give you my word—I feel like somebody else.

[*Enter* MRS. BETT *and* CORNISH.]

NINIAN

Nice old lady.

MRS. BETT

Who's a nice old lady?

DWIGHT

You, Mama Bett! Who else but you—eh? Well, now, Nin, what about you. You've been saying mighty little about yourself. What's been happening to you, anyway?——

NINIAN

That's the question.

DWIGHT

Traveling mostly—eh?

NINIAN

Yes, traveling mostly.

DWIGHT

I thought Ina and I might get over to the other side this year, but I guess not—I guess not.

MRS. BETT

Pity not to have went while the going was good.

DWIGHT

What's that, Mama Bett?

[*Enter* LULU.]

Ah, the lovely Lulu. She comes, she comes! My word what a costoom. And a coif*fure*.

LULU

Thank you. How do you do, Mr. Cornish?

CORNISH

How do you do, Miss Lulu? You see they're taking me along too.

LULU

That's nice. But, Mr. Deacon, I'm afraid I can't go after all. I haven't any gloves.

NINIAN

No backing out now.

DWIGHT

Can't you wear some old gloves of Ina's?

LULU

No, no. Ina's gloves are too fat for me—I mean too —mother, how does this hat look?

MRS. BETT

You'd ought to know how it looks, Lulie. You've had it on your head for ten years, hand-running.

LULU

And I haven't any theater cape. I couldn't go with my jacket and no gloves, could I?

DWIGHT

Now why need a charmer like you care about clothes!

LULU

I wouldn't want you gentlemen to be ashamed of me.

CORNISH

Why, Miss Lulu, you look real neat.

MRS. BETT

Act as good as you look, Lulie. You mind me and go on.

[*Enter* INA.]

DWIGHT

Ha! All ready with our hat on! For a wonder, all ready with our hat on.

INA

That isn't really necessary, Dwight.

LULU

Ina, I wondered—I thought about your linen duster. Would it hurt if I wore that?

DWIGHT

The new one?

LULU

Oh no, no. The old one.

INA

Why take it, Lulu, yes, certainly. Get it, Dwightie, there in the hall.

[DWIGHT *goes.*]

CORNISH

Miss Lulu, with all the solid virtues you've got, you don't need to think for a moment of how you look.

LULU

Now you're remembering the meat pie again, aren't you?

[*Enter* DWIGHT.]

DWIGHT

Now! The festive opera cloak. Allow me! My word, what a picture! Lulu the charmer dressed for her deboo into society, eh?

NINIAN

Dwight, shut your head. I want you to understand this is Miss Lulu Bett's party—and if she says to leave you home, we'll do it.

DWIGHT

Ah, ha! An understanding between these two.

CORNISH

Well, Miss Lulu, *I* think you're just fine anyway.

LULU

Oh, thank you. Thank you. . . .
[*Enter* DI.]

INA

All ready, darling?

DI

All ready—and so excited! Isn't it exciting, Mr. Cornish?

DWIGHT

Bless me if the whole family isn't assembled. Now isn't this pleasant! Ten—let me see—twelve minutes before we need set out. Then the city and dinner—not just Lulu's cooking, but dinner! By a chef.

INA

That's sheff, Dwightie. Not cheff.

DWIGHT

[*Indicating* INA.]
Little crusty to-night. Pettie, your hat's just a little mite—no, over the other way.

INA

Was there anything to prevent your speaking of that before?

LULU

Ina, that hat's ever so much prettier than the old one.

INA

I never saw anything the matter with the old one.

DWIGHT

She'll be all right when we get started—out among the bright lights. Adventure—adventure is what the woman wants. I'm too tame for her.

INA

Idiot.

[*Back at window,* BOBBY LARKIN *appears.* DI *slips across to him.*]

MRS. BETT

I s'pose you all think I like being left sitting here stark alone?

NINIAN

Why, Mrs. Bett——

INA

Why, mama——

LULU

Oh, mother, I'll stay with you.

DWIGHT

Oh, look here, if she really minds staying alone I'll stay with her.

MRS. BETT

Where you going anyway?

LULU

The theater, mama.

MRS. BETT

First I've heard of it.

[MONONA *is heard chanting.*]

INA

You'll have Monona with you, mama.

[MRS. BETT *utters one note of laughter, thin and high.*

[*Enter* MONONA.]

MONONA

Where you going?

INA

The city, dear.

[MONONA *cries.*]

Now quiet, pettie, quiet——

MONONA

You've all got to bring me something. And I'm going to sit up and eat it, too.

MRS. BETT

Come here, you poor, neglected child.

[*Throughout the following scene* MRS. BETT *is absorbed with* MONONA, *and* DI *with* BOBBY.]

DWIGHT

What's Lulu the charmer so still for, eh?

LULU

I was thinking how nice it is to be going off with you all like this.

DWIGHT

Such a moment advertises to the single the joys of family life as Ina and I live it.

INA

It's curious that you've never married, Ninian.

NINIAN

Don't say it like that. Maybe I have. Or maybe I will.

DWIGHT

She wants everybody to marry but she wishes she hadn't.

INA

Do you *have* to be so foolish?

DWIGHT

Hi—better get started before she makes a scene. It's too early yet, though. Well—Lulu, you dance on the table.

INA

Why, Dwight?

DWIGHT

Got to amuse ourselves somehow. They'll begin to read the funeral service over us.

NINIAN

Why not the wedding service?

DWIGHT

Ha, ha, ha!

NINIAN

I shouldn't object. Should you, Miss Lulu?

LULU

I—I don't know it so I can't say it.

NINIAN

I can say it.

DWIGHT

Where'd you learn it?

NINIAN

Goes like this: I, Ninian, take thee, Lulu, to be my wedded wife.

DWIGHT

Lulu don't dare say that.

NINIAN

Show him, Miss Lulu.

DWIGHT

I, Lulu, take thee, Ninian, to be my wedded husband.

NINIAN

You will?

LULU

I will. There—I guess I can join in like the rest of you.

NINIAN

And I will. There, by Jove! have we entertained the company, or haven't we?

INA

Oh, honestly—I don't think you ought to—holy things so—what's the matter, Dwightie?

DWIGHT

Say, by George, you know, a civil wedding is binding in this state.

NINIAN

A civil wedding—oh, well——

DWIGHT

But I happen to be a magistrate.

INA

Why, Dwightie—why, Dwightie. . . .

CORNISH

Mr. Deacon, this can't be possible.

DWIGHT

I tell you, what these two have said is all that they have to say according to law. And there don't have to be witnesses—say!

LULU

Don't . . . don't . . . don't let Dwight scare you.

NINIAN

Scare me! why, I think it's a good job done if you ask me.

[*Their eyes meet in silence.*]

INA

Mercy, sister!

DWIGHT

Oh, well—I should say we can have it set aside up in the city and no one will be the wiser.

NINIAN

Set aside nothing. I'd like to see it stand.

INA

Ninian, are you serious?

NINIAN

Of course I'm serious.

INA

Lulu. You hear him? What are you going to say to that?

LULU

He isn't in earnest.

NINIAN

I am in earnest—hope to die.

LULU

Oh, no, no!

NINIAN

You come with me. We'll have it done over again somewhere if you say so.

LULU

Why—why—that couldn't be. . . .

NINIAN

Why couldn't it be—why couldn't it?

LULU

How could you want me?

NINIAN

Didn't I tell you I liked you from the first minute I saw you?

LULU

Yes. Yes, you did. But—no, no. I couldn't let you——

NINIAN

Never mind that. Would *you* be willing to go with me? Would you?

LULU

But you—you said you wanted—oh, maybe you're just doing this because——

NINIAN

Lulu. Never mind any of that. Would *you* be willing to go with me?

LULU

Oh, if I thought——

NINIAN

Good girl——

INA

Why, Lulu. Why, Dwight. It can't be legal.

DWIGHT

Why? Because it's your sister? I've married dozens of couples this way. Dozens.

NINIAN

Good enough—eh, Lulu?

LULU

It's—it's all right, I guess.

DWIGHT

Well, I'll be dished.

CORNISH

Well, by Jerusalem. . . .

INA

Sister!

NINIAN

I was going to make a trip south this month on my way home from here. Suppose we make sure of this thing and start right off. You'd like that, wouldn't you? Going to Savannah?

LULU

Yes, I'd like that.

NINIAN

Then that's checked off.

DWIGHT

I suppose we call off our trip to the city to-night then.

NINIAN

Call off nothing. Come along. Give us a send-off. You can shoot our trunks after us, can't you? All right, Miss Lulu—er—er, Mrs. Lulu?

LULU

If you won't be ashamed of me.

NINIAN

I can buy you some things in the city to-morrow.

LULU

Oh. . . .

INA

Oh, mama, mama! Did you hear? Di! Aunt Lulu's married.

DI

Married? Aunt Lulu?

INA

Just now. Right here. By papa.

DI

Oh, to Mr. Cornish?

CORNISH

No, Miss Di. Don't you worry.

INA

To Ninian, mama. They've just been married—Lulu and Ninian.

MRS. BETT

Who's going to do your work?

LULU

Oh, mother dearest—I don't know who will. I ought not to have done this. Well, of course, I didn't do it——

MRS. BETT

I knew well enough you were all keeping something from me.

INA

But, mama! It was so sudden——

LULU

I never planned to do it, mother—not like this——

MRS. BETT

Well, Inie, I should think Lulie might have had a little more consideration to her than this.

[*At the window, behind the curtain,* DI *has just kissed* BOBBY *good-by.*]

LULU

Mother dearest, tell me it's all right.

MRS. BETT

This is what comes of going to the theater.

LULU

Mother——

DWIGHT

Come on, everybody, if we're going to make that train.

NINIAN

Yes. Let's get out of this.

CORNISH

Come, Miss Di.

INA

Oh, I'm so *flustrated!*

DWIGHT

Come, come, come all! On to the festive city!

MONONA

[*Dancing stiffly up and down.*]

I was to a wedding! I was to a wedding!

NINIAN

Good-by, Mama Bett!

LULU

Mother, mother! Don't forget the two pies!

CURTAIN

ACT II

Scene I

Side porch, *wicker furnished. At the back are two windows, attractively curtained and revealing shaded lamps; between the windows a door, of good lines, set in white clapboards. The porch is raised but a step or two. Low greenery, and a path leading off sharply left. It is evening, a month after* Lulu's *marriage.*

[*Discover* Ina, Dwight, Mrs. Bett *and* Monona.]

Ina

Dwight dear, the screen has never been put on that back window.

Dwight

Now, why can't my puss remind me of that in the morning instead of the only time I have to take my ease with my family.

Ina

But, Dwight, in the mornings you are so busy——

Dwight

What an argumentative puss you are. By Jove! look at that rambler rosebush. It's got to be sprayed.

INA

You've said that every night for a week, Dwight. . . .

DWIGHT

Don't exaggerate like that, Ina. It's bad for Monona.

INA

Dwight, look, quick. There go our new neighbors. They have a limousine— Perhaps I have been a little slow about calling. Look at them, Dwight!

DWIGHT

My dear Ina, I see them. Do you want me to pat them on the back?

INA

Well, I think you might be interested.

[MONONA *chants softly.*]

Dwight, I wonder if Monona really has a musical gift.

DWIGHT

She's a most unusual child. Do you know it?

[*Enter* DI, *from house.*]

INA

Oh, they both are. Where are *you* going, I'd like to know?

DI

Mama, I have to go down to the liberry.

INA

It seems to me you have to go to the library every evening. Dwight, do you think she ought to go?

DWIGHT

Diana, is it necessary that you go?

DI

Well, everybody else goes, and——

INA

I will not have you downtown in the evenings.

DI

But you let me go last night.

INA

All the better reason why you should *not* go to-night.

MONONA

Mama, let me go with her.

INA

Very well, Di, you may go and take your sister.

MONONA

Goody, goody! last time you wouldn't let me go.

INA

That's why mama's going to let you go to-night.

DWIGHT

I thought you said the child must go to bed half an hour earlier because she wouldn't eat her egg.

INA

Yes, that's so, I did. Monona, you can't go.

MONONA

But I didn't want my egg—honest I didn't.

INA

Makes no difference. You must eat or you'll get sick. Mama's going to teach you to eat. Go on, Di, to the library if it's necessary.

DWIGHT

I suppose Bobby Larkin has to go to the library to-night, eh?

INA

Dwight, I wouldn't joke her about him. Scold her about him, the way you did this morning.

DI

But papa was cross about something else this morning. And to-night he isn't. Good-by, Dwight and Ina! [*Exit* DI.]

MONONA

I hate the whole family.

MRS. BETT

Well, I should think she would.

INA

Why, mama! Why, Pettie Deacon!

[MONONA *weeps silently.*]

DWIGHT

[*To* INA.]

Say no more, my dear. It's best to overlook. Show a sweet spirit. . . .

MRS. BETT

About as much like a father and mother as a cat and dog.

DWIGHT

We've got to learn——

MRS. BETT

Performin' like a pair of weathercocks.

[*Both talking at once.*]

DWIGHT

Mother Bett! Are you talking, or am I?

MRS. BETT

I am. But you don't seem to know it.

DWIGHT

Let us talk, pussy, and she'll simmer down. Ah—nothing new from the bride and groom?

INA

No, Dwight. And it's been a week since Lulu wrote. She said he'd bought her a new red dress—and a hat. Isn't it too funny—to think of Lulu——

DWIGHT

I don't understand why they plan to go straight to Oregon without coming here first.

INA

It isn't a bit fair to mama, going off that way. Leaving her own mother—why, she may never see mama again.

MRS. BETT

Oh I'm going to last on quite a while yet.

DWIGHT

Of course you are, Mama Bett. You're my best girl. That reminds me, Ina, we must run up to visit Aunt Mollie. We ought to run up there next week. She isn't well.

INA

Let's do that. Dear me, I wish Lulu was here to leave in charge. I certainly do miss Lulu—lots of ways.

MRS. BETT

'Specially when it comes mealtime.

INA

Is that somebody coming here?

DWIGHT

Looks like it—yes, so it is. Some caller, as usual.

[*Enter* LULU.]

Well, if it isn't Miss Lulu Bett.

INA

Why, sister!

MRS. BETT

Lulie. Lulie. Lulie.

LULU

How did you know?

INA

Know what?

LULU

That it isn't Lulu Deacon.

DWIGHT

What's this?

INA

Isn't Lulu Deacon. What are you talking?

LULU

Didn't he write to you?

DWIGHT

Not a word. All we've had we had from you—the last from Savannah, Georgia.

LULU

Savannah, Georgia. . . .

DWIGHT

Well, but he's here with you, isn't he?

INA

Where is he? Isn't he here?

LULU

Must be most to Oregon by this time.

DWIGHT

Oregon?

LULU

You see, he had another wife.

INA

Another wife!

DWIGHT

Why, he had not.

LULU

Yes, another wife. He hasn't seen her for fifteen years and he thinks she's dead. But he isn't sure.

DWIGHT

Nonsense. Why of course she's dead if he thinks so.

LULU

I had to be sure.

INA

Monona! Go upstairs to bed at once.

MONONA

It's only quarter of.

INA

Do as mama tells you.

MONONA

But——

INA

Monona!

[*She goes, kissing them all good-night and taking her time about it. Everything is suspended while she kisses them and departs, walking slowly backward.*]

MRS. BETT

Married? Lulie, was your husband married?

LULU

Yes, my husband was married, mother.

INA

Mercy, think of anything like that in our family.

DWIGHT

Well, go on—go on. Tell us about it.

LULU

We were going to Oregon. First down to New Orleans and then out to California and up the coast. . . . Well, then at Savannah, Georgia, he said he thought I better know first. So then he told me.

DWIGHT

Yes—well, what did he say?

LULU

Cora Waters. Cora Waters. She married him down in San Diego eighteen years ago. She went to South America with him.

DWIGHT

Well, he never let us know of it, if she did.

LULU

No. She married him just before he went. Then in South America, after two years, she ran away. That's all he knows.

DWIGHT

That's a pretty story.

LULU

He says if she was alive she'd be after him for a divorce. And she never has been so he thinks she must be dead. The trouble is he wasn't sure. And I had to be sure.

INA

Well, but mercy! Couldn't he find out now?

LULU

It might take a long time and I didn't want to stay and not know.

INA

Well then why didn't he say so here?

LULU

He would have. But you know how sudden everything was. He said he thought about telling us right here that afternoon when—when it happened but of course that'd been hard, wouldn't it? And then he felt so sure she was dead.

INA

Why did he tell you at all then?

DWIGHT

Yes. Why indeed?

LULU

I thought that just at first but only just at first. Of course that wouldn't have been right. And then you see he gave me my choice.

DWIGHT

Gave you your choice?

LULU

Yes. About going on and taking the chances. He gave me my choice when he told me, there in Savannah, Georgia.

DWIGHT

What made him conclude by then that you ought to be told?

LULU

Why, he'd got to thinking about it.

[*A silence.*]

The only thing as long as it happened I kind of wish he hadn't told me till we got to Oregon.

INA

Lulu! Oh, you poor poor thing. . . .

[MRS. BETT *suddenly joins* INA *in tears, rocking her body.*]

LULU

Don't, mother. Oh, Ina, don't. . . . He felt bad too.

DWIGHT

He! He must have.

INA

It's you. It's you. *My* sister!

LULU

I never thought of it making you both feel bad. I knew it would make Dwight feel bad. I mean, it was his brother——

INA

Thank goodness! nobody need know about it.

LULU

Oh, yes. People will have to know.

DWIGHT

I do not see the necessity.

LULU

Why, what would they think?

DWIGHT

What difference does it make what they think?

LULU

Why, I shouldn't like—you see they might—why, Dwight, I think we'll have to tell them.

DWIGHT

You do. You think the disgrace of bigamy in this family is something the whole town will have to know about.

LULU

Say. I never thought about it being that.

DWIGHT

What did you think it was? And whose disgrace is it, pray?

LULU

Mine. And Ninian's.

DWIGHT

Ninian's. Well, he's gone. But you're here. And I'm here—and my family. Folks'll feel sorry for you. But the disgrace, that would reflect on me.

LULU

But if we don't tell what'll they think?

DWIGHT

They'll think what they always think when a wife leaves her husband. They'll think you couldn't get along. That's all.

LULU

I should hate that. I wouldn't want them to think I hadn' been a good wife to Ninian.

DWIGHT

Wife? You never were his wife. That's just the point.

LULU

Oh!

DWIGHT

Don't you realize the position he's in? . . . See here—do you intend— Are you going to sue Ninian?

LULU

Oh! no! no! no!

INA

Why, Lulu, any one would think you loved him.

LULU

I do love him. And he loved me. Don't you think I know? He loved me.

INA

Lulu.

LULU

I love him—I do, and I'm not ashamed to tell you.

MRS. BETT

Lulie, Lulie, was his other wife—was she *there?*

LULU

No, no, mother. She wasn't there.

MRS. BETT

Then it ain't so bad. I was afraid maybe she turned you out.

LULU

No, no. It wasn't that bad, mother.

DWIGHT

In fact I simply will not have it, Lulu. You expect, I take it, to make your home with us in the future on the old terms.

LULU

Well——

DWIGHT

I mean did Ninian give you any money?

LULU

No. He didn't give me any money—only enough to get home on. And I kept my suit and the other dress—why! I wouldn't have taken any money.

DWIGHT

That means that you will have to continue to live here on the old terms and of course I'm quite willing that you should. Let me tell you, however, that this is on condition—on condition that this disgraceful business is kept to ourselves.

INA

Truly, Lulu, wouldn't that be best? They'll talk anyway. But this way they'll only talk about you and the other way it'll be about all of us.

LULU

But the other way would be the truth.

DWIGHT

My dear Lulu, are you sure of that?

LULU

Sure?

DWIGHT

Yes. Did he give you any proofs?

LULU

Proofs?

DWIGHT

Letters—documents of any sort? Any sort of assurance that he was speaking the truth?

LULU

Why—no. Proofs—no. He told me.

DWIGHT

He told you!

LULU

That was hard enough to have to do. It was terrible for him to have to do. What proofs——

DWIGHT

I may as well tell you that I myself have no idea that Ninian told you the truth. He was always imagining things, inventing things—you must have seen that. I know him pretty well—have been in touch with him more or less the whole time. In short I haven't the least idea he was ever married before.

LULU

I never thought of that.

DWIGHT

Look here—hadn't you and he had some little tiff when he told you?

LULU

No—no! Not once. He was very good to me. This dress—and my shoes—and my hat. And another dress, too.

[*She takes off her hat.*]

He liked the red wing—I wanted black—oh, Dwight! He did tell me the truth!

DWIGHT

As long as there's any doubt about it—and I feel the gravest doubts—I desire that you should keep silent and protect my family from this scandal. I have taken you into my confidence about these doubts for your own profit.

LULU

My own profit!

[*Moves toward the door.*]

INA

Lulu—you see! We just couldn't have this known about Dwight's own brother, could we now?

DWIGHT

You have it in your own hands to repay me, Lulu, for anything that you feel I may have done for you in the past. You also have it in your hands to decide whether your home here continues. This is not a pleasant position for me to find myself in. In fact it is distinctly unpleasant I may say. But you see for yourself.

[LULU *goes into the house.*]

MRS. BETT

Wasn't she married when she thought she was?

INA

Mama, do please remember Monona. Yes—Dwight thinks now she's married all right and that it was all right, all the time.

MRS. BETT

Well, I hope so, for pity sakes.

MONONA'S VOICE

[*From upstairs.*]

Mama! Come on and hear me say my prayers, why don't you?

DARKNESS

Scene II

Ina *seated.* Monona *jumping on and off the porch, chanting.*

[*Enter* Dwight.]

Dwight

Ah, this is great . . . no place like home after all, is there?

Ina

Now, Monona, sit down and be quiet. You've played enough for one day.

[*Enter* Mrs. Bett.]

Monona

How do you know I have?

Dwight

Ah, Mama Bett. Coming out to enjoy the evening air?

Mrs. Bett

No, I thank you.

Dwight

Well, well, well, let's see what's new in the great press of our country. . . .

[*They are now seated in the approximate positions assumed at the opening of* Scene I.]

INA

Dwight dear, nothing has been done about that screen for the back window.

DWIGHT

Now why couldn't my puss have reminded me of that this morning instead of waiting for the only time I have to take my ease with my family.

INA

But Dwightie, in the mornings you're so busy——

DWIGHT

You are argumentative, pussy—you certainly are. And you ought to curb it. For that matter I haven't sprayed that rambler rosebush.

INA

Every single night for a month you've spoken of spraying that rosebush.

DWIGHT

Ina, will you cease your exaggerations on Monona's account if not on mine. Exaggeration, my pet, is one of the worst of female faults. Exaggeration——

INA

Look, Dwight! our new neighbors have got a dog. Great big brute of a thing. He's going to tear up every towel I spread on our grass. . . .

[*Enter* DI, *from the house.*]

Now, Di, where are you going?

DI

Mama, I have to go down to the liberry.

INA

Now, Di——

DI

You let me go last night.

MONONA

Mama, I can go, can't I? Because you wouldn't let me go last night.

INA

No, Monona, you may *not* go.

MONONA

Oh, why not?

INA

Because mama says so. Isn't that enough?

MRS. BETT

Anybody'd think you was the king—layin' down the law an' layin' down the law an' layin' down—— Where's Lulie?

DI

Mama, isn't Uncle Ninian coming back?

INA

Hush. . . . No. Now don't ask mama any more questions.

DI

But supposing people ask me. What'll I say?

INA

Don't say anything at all about Aunt Lulu.

DI

But, mama, what has she done?

INA

Di! Don't you think mama knows best?

DI

[*Softly.*]

No, I don't. . . . Well anyway Aunt Lulu's got on a perfectly beautiful dress to-night. . . .

INA

And you know, Dwight, Lulu's clothes give me the funniest feeling. As if Lulu was wearing things bought for her by some one that wasn't—that was——

DWIGHT

By her husband who has left her.

DI

Is that what it is, papa?

DWIGHT

That's what it is, my little girl.

DI

Well, I think it's a shame. And I think Uncle Ninian is a slunge.

INA

Di Deacon!

DI

I do! And I'd be ashamed to think anything else. I'd like to tell everybody.

DWIGHT

There's no need for secrecy now.

INA

Dwight, really—do you think we ought——

DWIGHT

No need whatever for secrecy. The truth is Lulu's husband has tired of her and sent her home. We may as well face it.

INA

But Dwight—how awful for Lulu. . . .

DWIGHT

Lulu has us to stand by her.

[*Enter* LULU.]

LULU

That sounds good. That I have you to stand by me.

DWIGHT

My dear Lulu, the family bond is the strongest bond in the world. Family. Tribe. The—er—pack. Standing up for the family honor, the family reputation is the highest nobility.

[*Exit* DI *by degrees. Left.*]

I tell you of all history the most beautiful product is the family tie. Of it are born family consideration——

INA

Why, you don't look like yourself . . . is it your hair, Lulu? You look so strange. . . .

LULU

Don't you like it? Ninian liked it.

DWIGHT

In that case I think you'd show more modesty if you arranged your hair in the old way.

LULU

Yes, you would think so. Dwight, I want you to give me Ninian's Oregon address.

DWIGHT

You want what?

LULU

Ninian's Oregon address. It's a funny thing but I haven't it.

DWIGHT

It would seem that you have no particular need for that particular address.

LULU

Yes I have. I want it. You have it haven't you, Dwight?

DWIGHT

Certainly I have it.

LULU

Won't you please write it down for me?
[*She offers him tablet.*]

DWIGHT

My dear Lulu, now why revive anything? No good can come by——

LULU

But why shouldn't I have his address?

DWIGHT

If everything is over between you why should you?

LULU

But you say he's still my husband.

DWIGHT

If my brother has shown his inclination as plainly as I judge that he has it is certainly not my place to put you in touch with him again.

LULU

I don't know whose place it is. But I've got to know more—I've got to know more, Dwight. This afternoon I went to the post office to ask for his address—it seemed so strange to be doing that, after all that's been— They didn't know his address—I could see how they wondered at my asking. And I knew how the others wondered—Mis' Martin, Mis' Curtis, Mis' Grove. "Where you hiding that handsome husband of yours?" they said. All I could say was that he isn't here. Dwight! I won't live like that. I want to know the truth. You give me Ninian's address.

DWIGHT

My dear Lulu! My *dear* Lulu! You are not the one to write to him. Have you no delicacy?

LULU

So much delicacy that I want to be sure whether I'm married or not.

DWIGHT

Then I myself will take this up with my brother. I will write to him about it.

LULU

Here's everything—if you're going to write him, do it now.

DWIGHT

My dear Lulu! don't be absurd.

LULU

Ina! Help me! If this was Dwight—and they didn't know whether he had another wife or not and you wanted to ask him and you didn't know where he was—oh, don't you see? Help me.

INA

Well of course. I see it all, Lulu. And yet—why not let Dwight do it in his own way? Wouldn't that be better?

LULU

Mother!

MRS. BETT

Lulie. Set down. Set down, why don't you?

LULU

Dwight, you write that letter to Ninian. And you make him tell you so that you'll understand. I know he spoke the truth. But I want you to know.

DWIGHT

M—m. And then I suppose as soon as you have the proofs you're going to tell it all over town.

LULU

I'm going to tell it all over town just as it is—unless you write to him.

INA

Lulu! Oh, you wouldn't!

LULU

I would. I will.

DWIGHT

And get turned out of the house as you would be?

INA

Dwight. Oh, you wouldn't!

DWIGHT

I would. I will. Lulu knows it.

LULU

I shall tell what I know and then leave your house anyway unless you get Ninian's word. And you're going to write to him now.

DWIGHT

You would leave your mother? And leave Ina?

LULU

Leave everything.

INA

Oh, Dwight! We can't get along without Lulu.

DWIGHT

Isn't this like a couple of women? . . . Rather than let you in for a show of temper, Lulu, I'd do anything.

[*Writes.*]

MONONA

[*Behind* INA.]

Mama, can I write Uncle Ninian a little letter, too?

INA

For pity sakes, aren't you in bed yet?

MONONA

It's only quarter of.

INA

Well you may go to bed *now* because you have sat there listening. How often must mama tell you not to listen to grown people.

MONONA

Do they always say something bad?

INA

Monona, you are to go up to bed at once.

[*She makes her leisurely rounds for kisses.*]

MONONA

Papa, it's your turn to hear me say my prayers tonight.

DWIGHT

Very well, pettie. When you're ready call me.

[*Exit* MONONA.]

There, Lulu. The deed is done. Now I hope you're satisfied.

[*Places the letter in his pocket.*]

LULU

I want you to give me the letter to mail, please.

DWIGHT

Why this haste, sister mine? I'll mail it in the morning.

LULU

I'll mail it now. Now.

DWIGHT

I may take a little stroll before bedtime—I'll mail it then. There's nothing like a brisk walk to induce sound restful sleep.

LULU

I'll mail the letter now.

DWIGHT

I suppose I'll have to humor your sister, Ina. Purely on your account you understand.
[*Hands the letter.*]

INA

Oh, Dwight, how good you are!

LULU

There's—there's one thing more I want to speak about. If—if you and Ina go to your Aunt Mollie's then Ninian's letter might come while you're away.

DWIGHT

Conceivably. Letters do come while a man's away.

LULU

Yes. And I thought if you wouldn't mind if I opened it——

DWIGHT

Opened it? Opened *my* letter?

LULU

Yes, you see it'll be about me mostly. You wouldn't mind if I did open it?

DWIGHT

But you say you know what will be in it, *Miss* Bett?

LULU

I did know till you—I've got to see that letter, Dwight.

DWIGHT

And so you shall. But not until I show it to you. My dear Lulu, you know how I hate having my mail interfered with. You shall see the letter all in good time when Ina and I return.

LULU

You wouldn't want to let me—just see what he says?

DWIGHT

I prefer always to open my own letters.

LULU

Very well, Dwight.

[*She moves away. Right.*]

INA

And Lulu, I meant to ask you: Don't you think it might be better if you—if you kept out of sight for a few days?

LULU

Why?

INA

Why set people wondering till we have to?

LULU

They don't have to wonder as far as I'm concerned.
[*Exit.*]

MRS. BETT

I'm going through the kitchen to set with Grandma Gates. She always says my visits are like a dose of medicine.
[*Exit* MRS. BETT.]

INA

It certainly has changed Lulu—a man coming into her life. She never spoke to me like that before.

DWIGHT

I saw she wasn't herself. I'd do anything to avoid having a scene—you know that. . . . You do know that, don't you?

INA

But I really think you ought to have written to Ninian. It's—it's not a nice position for Lulu.

DWIGHT

Nice! But whom has she got to blame for it?

INA

Why, Ninian.

DWIGHT

Herself! To tell you the truth, I was perfectly amazed at the way she snapped him up here that afternoon.

INA

Why but Dwight——

DWIGHT

Brazen. Oh, it was brazen.

INA

It was just fun in the first place.

DWIGHT

But no really nice woman——

INA

Dwightie—what did you say in the letter?

DWIGHT

What did I say? I said, I said: "DEAR BROTHER, I take it that the first wife story was devised to relieve you of a distasteful situation. Kindly confirm. Family well as usual. Business fair." Covers it, don't it?

INA

Oh, Dwightie—how complete that is.

DWIGHT

I'm pretty good at writing brief concise letters—that say the whole thing, eh?

INA

I've often noticed that. . . .

DWIGHT

My precious pussy. . . . Oh, how unlike Lulu you are!

[*Right.* DI *and* BOBBY *appear, walking very slowly and very near.*]

[DWIGHT *rises, holds out his arms.*]

INA

Poor dear foolish Lulu! oh, Dwight—what if it was Di in Lulu's place?

DWIGHT

Such a thing couldn't happen to Di. Di was born with ladylike feelings.

[*They enter the house.* INA *extinguishes a lamp.* DWIGHT *turns down the hall gas. Pause.* DI *and* BOBBY *come to the veranda.*]

DI

Bobby dear! You don't kiss me as if you really wanted to kiss me to-night. . . .

DARKNESS

Scene III

THE SAME. *Evening, a week later. Stage flooded with moonlight, house lighted. At the piano, just inside the window,* LULU *and* CORNISH *are finishing a song together,* LULU *accompanying.*

How sweet the happy evening's close,
'Tis the hour of sweet repose—
Good-night.

The summer wind has sunk to rest,
The moon serenely bright
Unfolds her calm and gentle ray,
Softly now she seems to say,
Good-night.

[*As they sing,* DI *slips into the house, unseen.*]

CORNISH

Why, Miss Lulu, you're quite a musician.

LULU

Oh, no. I've never played in front of anybody——
[*They come to the porch.*]
I don't know what Ina and Dwight would say if they heard me.

CORNISH

What a pretty dress that is, Miss Lulu!

LULU

I made this from one of Ina's old ones since she's been gone. I don't know what Ina and Dwight are going to say about this dress, made like this, when they get home.

CORNISH

When are they coming back?

LULU

Any time now. They've been gone most a week. Do you know I never had but one compliment before that wasn't for my cooking.

CORNISH

You haven't!

LULU

He told me I done up my hair nice. That was after I took notice how the ladies in Savannah, Georgia, done up theirs.

CORNISH

I guess you can do most anything you set your hand to, Miss Lulu: Look after Miss Di and sing and play and cook——

LULU

Yes, cook. But I can't earn anything. I'd like to earn something.

CORNISH

You would! Why, you have it fine here, I thought.

LULU

Oh, fine, yes. Dwight gives me what I have. And I do their work.

CORNISH

I see. I never thought of that. . . .
[*Pause.*]

LULU

You're wondering why I didn't stay with *him!*

CORNISH

Oh, no.

LULU

Yes you are! The whole town's wondering. They're all talking about me.

CORNISH

Well, Miss Lulu, you know it don't make any difference to your friends what people say.

LULU

But they don't know the truth. You see, he had another wife.

CORNISH

Lord sakes!

LULU

Dwight thinks it isn't true. He thinks—he didn't have another wife. . . . You see, Dwight thinks he didn't want me.

CORNISH

But—your husband—I mean, why doesn't he write to Mr. Deacon and tell him the truth——

LULU

He has written. The letter's in there on the piano.

CORNISH

What'd he say?

LULU

Dwight doesn't like me to touch his mail. I'll have to wait till he comes back.

CORNISH

Lord sakes! . . . You—you—you're too nice a girl to get a deal like this. Darned if you aren't.

LULU

Oh, no.

CORNISH

Yes you are, too! And there ain't a thing I can do.

LULU

It's a good deal to have somebody to talk to. . . .

CORNISH

Sure it is.

LULU

. . . . Cora Waters. Cora Waters, of San Diego, California. And she never heard of me.

CORNISH

No. She never did, did she? Ain't life the darn——
[*Enter* MRS. BETT.]

MRS. BETT

I got Monona into bed. And it's no fool of a job neither.

LULU

Did you, mother? Come and sit down.

MRS. BETT

Yes. She went to bed with a full set of doll dishes. . . . Ain't it nice with the folks all gone? . . . I don't hear any more playin' and singin'. It sounded real good.

LULU

We sung all I knew how to play, mama.

MRS. BETT

I use' to play on the melodeon.

CORNISH

Well, well, well.

MRS. BETT

That was when I was first married. We had a little log house in a clearing in York State. I was seventeen—and he was nineteen. While he was chopping I use' to sit on a log with my sewing. Jenny was born in that house. I was alone at the

time. I was alone with her when she died, too. She was sixteen—little bits of hands she had——

[*Yawns. Rises, wanders toward door.*]

Can't we have some more playin' and singin'?

LULU

After a little while, mama—dear.

MRS. BETT

It went kind of nice—that last tune you sung.

[*Hums the air. Enters house.*]

CORNISH

I must be going along too, Miss Lulu.

LULU

I can't think why Di doesn't come. She ought not to be out like this without telling me——

[MRS. BETT *appears beside the piano, lifts and examines the letters lying there.*]

CORNISH

Well, don't you mind on my account. I've enjoyed every minute I've been here.

LULU

Mother! Those are Dwight's letters—don't you touch them.

MRS. BETT

I ain't hurting them or him neither.

[*Disappears, the letters in her hand.*]

CORNISH

Good-night, Miss Lulu. If there was anything I could do at any time you'd let me know, wouldn't you?

LULU

Oh, thank you.

CORNISH

I've had an awful nice time, singing, and listening to you talk—well of course—I mean the supper was just fine! And so was the music.

LULU

Oh, no.

[MRS. BETT *appears at the door with a letter.*]

MRS. BETT

Lulie. I guess you didn't notice. This one's from Ninian.

LULU

Mother——

MRS. BETT

I opened it—why of course I did. It's from Ninian. [*Holds out unfolded letter and an old newspaper clipping.*]

The paper's awful old—years back, looks like. See. Says "Corie Waters, music hall singer—married last night to Ninian Deacon"— Say, Lulie, that must be her.

LULU

Yes, that's her. That's her—Cora Waters. . . . Oh, then he *was* married to her just like he said!

CORNISH

Oh, Miss Lulu! I'm so sorry!

LULU

No, no. Because he wanted me! He didn't say that just to get rid of me!

CORNISH

Oh, that way. . . . I see. . . .

LULU

I'm so thankful it wasn't that.

MRS. BETT

Then everything's all right onct more. Ain't that nice!

LULU

I'm so thankful it wasn't that.

CORNISH

Yes, I can understand that. Well, I—I guess I ought to be going now, Miss Lulu. . . . Why, it *is* Miss Lulu Bett, isn't it?

LULU

[*Abstractedly, with the paper.*]

Yes—yes—good-night, Mr. Cornish. Good-night.

CORNISH

Good-night, Miss Lulu. . . . I wonder if you would let me tell you something.

LULU

Why——

CORNISH

I guess I don't amount to much. I'll never be a lawyer. I'm no good at business and everything I say sounds wrong to me. And yet I do believe I do know enough not to bully a woman—not to make her unhappy, maybe even—I could make her a little happy. Miss Lulu, I hate to see you looking and talking so sad. Do you think we could possibly arrange——

LULU

Oh!

CORNISH

I guess maybe you've heard something about a little something I'm supposed to inherit. Well, I got it. Of course, it's only five hundred dollars. We could get that little Warden house and furnish up the parlor with pianos—that is, if you could ever think of marrying me.

LULU

Don't say that—don't say that!

MRS. BETT

Better take him, Lulie. A girl ought to take any young man that will propose in front of her mother!

CORNISH

Of course if you loved him very much then I'd ought not to be talking this way to you.

LULU

You see Ninian was the first person who was ever kind to me. Nobody ever wanted me, nobody ever even thought of me. Then he came. It might have been somebody else. It might have been you. But it happened to be Ninian and I do love him.

CORNISH

I see. I guess you'll forgive me for what I said.

LULU

Of course.

CORNISH

Miss Lulu, if that five hundred could be of any use to you, I wish you'd take it.

LULU

Oh, thank you, thank you, I couldn't.

CORNISH

Well, I guess I'll be stepping along. If you should want me, I'm always there. I guess you know that.

[*Exit.*]

MRS. BETT

Better burn that up. I wouldn't have it round.

LULU

But mother! Mother dear, try to understand. This means that Ninian told the truth. He wasn't just trying to get rid of me.

MRS. BETT

Did he want you to stay with him?

LULU

I don't know. But I think he did. Anyway, now I know the truth about him.

MRS. BETT

Well, I wouldn't want anybody else to know. Here, let me have it and burn it up.

LULU

Mama, mama! Aren't you glad for me that now I can prove Ninian wasn't just making up a story so I'd go away?

MRS. BETT

[*Clearly and beautifully.*]

Oh, Lulu! My little girl! Is that what they said about you? Mother knows it wasn't like that. Mother knows he loved you. . . . How still it is here! Where's Inie?

LULU

They've gone away, you know. . . .

MRS. BETT

Well, I guess I'll step over to Grandma Gates's a spell. See how her rheumatism is. I'll be back before long—I'll be back. . . .

[*Exit. For a moment* LULU *breaks down and sobs. Rises to lay* DWIGHT'S *letter through the window on piano. Slight sound. She listens. Enter* DI *from house. She is carrying a traveling bag.*]

LULU

Di! Why Di! What does this mean? Where were you going? Why, mama won't like your carrying her nice new satchel. . . .

DI

Aunt Lulu—the idea. What right have you to interfere with me like this?

LULU

Di, you must explain to me what this means. . . . Di, where can you be going with a satchel this time of the night? Di Deacon, are you running away with somebody?

DI

You have no right to ask me questions, Aunt Lulu.

LULU

Di, you're going off with Bobby Larkin. Aren't you? Aren't you?

DI

If I am it's entirely our own affair.

LULU

Why, Di. If you and Bobby want to be married why not let us get you up a nice wedding here at home——

DI

Aunt Lulu, you're a funny person to be telling *me* what to do.

LULU

I love you just as much as if I was married happy, in a home.

DI

Well, you aren't. And I'm going to do just as I think best. Bobby and I are the ones most concerned in this, Aunt Lulu.

LULU

But—but getting married is for your whole life!

DI

Yours wasn't.

LULU

Di, my dear little girl, you must wait at least till mama and papa get home.

DI

That's likely. They say I'm not to be married till I'm twenty-one.

LULU

Well, but how young that is.

DI

It is to you. It isn't young to me, remember, Aunt Lulu.

LULU

But this is wrong—it is wrong!

DI

There's nothing wrong about getting married if you stay married.

LULU

Well, then it can't be wrong to let your mother and father know.

DI

It isn't. But they'd treat me wrong. Mama'd cry and say I was disgracing *her*. And papa—first he'd scold me and then he'd joke me about it. He'd joke me about it every day for weeks, every morning at breakfast, every night here on the porch—he'd joke me.

LULU

Why, Di! Do you feel that way, too?

DI

You don't know what it is to be laughed at or paid no attention to, everything you say.

LULU

Don't I? Don't I? Is that why you're going?

DI

Well, it's one reason.

LULU

But Di, do you love Bobby Larkin?

DI

Well. . . . I could love almost anybody real nice that was nice to me.

LULU

Di . . . Di. . . .

DI

It's true.

[BOBBY *enters.*]

You ought to know that. . . . You did it. Mama said so.

LULU

Don't you think that I don't know. . . .

DI

Oh, Bobby, she's trying to stop us! But she can't do it—I've told her so——

BOBBY

She don't have to stop us. We're stopped.

DI

What do you mean?

BOBBY

We're minors.

DI

Well, gracious—you didn't have to tell them that.

BOBBY

No. They knew *I* was.

DI

But, silly. Why didn't you tell them you're not.

BOBBY

But I am.

DI

For pity sakes—don't you know how to do anything?

BOBBY

What would you have me do, I'd like to know?

DI

Why tell them we're both—whatever it is they want us to be. We look it. We know we're responsible—that's all they care for. Well, you are a funny. . . .

BOBBY

You wanted me to lie?

DI

Oh! don't make out you never told a fib.

BOBBY

Well, but this—why, Di—about a thing like this. . . .

DI

I never heard of a lover flatting out like that!

BOBBY

Anyhow, there's nothing to do now. The cat's out. I've told our ages. We've got to have our folks in on it.

DI

Is that all you can think of?

BOBBY

What else is there to think of?

DI

Why, let's go to Bainbridge or Holt and tell them we're of age and be married there.

LULU

Di, wherever you go I'll go with you. I won't let you out of my sight.

DI

Bobby, why don't you answer her?

BOBBY

But I'm not going to Bainbridge or Holt or any town and lie, to get you or any other girl.

DI

You're about as much like a man in a story as—as papa is.

[*Enter* DWIGHT *and* INA.]

DWIGHT

What's this? What's this about papa?

INA

Well, what's all this going on here?

LULU

Why, Ina!

DI

Oh, mama! I—I didn't know you were coming so soon. Hello, dear! Hello, papa! Here's—here's Bobby. . . .

DWIGHT

What an unexpected pleasure, *Master* Bobby.

BOBBY

Good-evening, Mrs. Deacon. Good-evening, Mr. Deacon.

DWIGHT

And Lulu. Is it Lulu? Is this lovely houri our Lulu? Is this Miss Lulu Bett? Or is this Lulu something else by now? You can't tell what Lulu'll do when you leave her alone at home. Ina—our festive ball gown!

LULU

Ina, I made it out of that old muslin of yours, you know. I thought you wouldn't care——

INA

Oh, that! I was going to use it for Di but it doesn't matter. You are welcome to it, Lulu. Little youthful for anything but home wear, isn't it?

DWIGHT

It looks like a wedding gown. Why are you wearing a wedding gown—eh, Lulu?

INA

Di Deacon, what have you got mama's new bag for?

DI

I haven't done anything to the bag, mama.

INA

Well, but what are you doing with it here?

DI

Oh, nothing! Did you—did you have a good time?

INA

Yes, we did—but I can't see. . . . Dwight, look at Di with my new black satchel.

DWIGHT

What is this, Diana?

DI

Well, I'm—I'm not going to use it for anything.

INA

I wish somebody would explain what is going on here. Lulu, can't you explain?

DWIGHT

Aha! Now, if Lulu is going to explain that's something like it. When Lulu begins to explain we get imagination going.

LULU

Di and I have a little secret. Can't we have a little secret if we want one?

DWIGHT

Upon my word, she has a beautiful secret. I don't know about your secrets, Lulu.

[*Enter* MRS. BETT.]

MRS. BETT

Hello, Inie.

INA

Oh, mother dear. . . .

DWIGHT

Well, Mother Bett. . . .

MRS. BETT

That you, Dwight?

[*To* BOBBY.]

. . . Don't you help me. I guess I can help myself yet awhile.

[*Climbs the two steps.*]

[*To* DI.]

Made up your mind to come home, did you?
[*Seats herself.*]
I got a joke. Grandma Gates says it's all over town they wouldn't give Di and Bobby Larkin a license to get married.
[*Single note of laughter, thin and high.*]

DWIGHT

What nonsense!

INA

Is it nonsense? Haven't I been trying to find out where the new black bag went? Di! Look at mama. . . .

DI

Listen to that, Bobby. Listen!

INA

That won't do, Di. You can't deceive mama, and don't you try.

BOBBY

Mrs. Deacon, I——

DWIGHT

Diana!

DI

Yes, papa.

DWIGHT

Answer your mother. Answer *me*. Is there anything in this absurd tale?

DI

No, papa.

DWIGHT

Nothing whatever?

DI

No, papa.

DWIGHT

Can you imagine how such a ridiculous story started?

DI

No, papa.

DWIGHT

Very well. Now we know where we are. If anybody hears this report repeated, send them to *me*.

INA

Well, but that satchel——

DWIGHT

One moment. Lulu will of course verify what the child has said.

LULU

If you cannot settle this with Di, you cannot settle it with me.

DWIGHT

A shifty answer. You're a bird at misrepresenting facts. . . .

LULU

Oh! . . .

DWIGHT

Lulu, the bird!

LULU

Lulu, the dove to put up with you.

[*Exit.*]

INA

Bobby wanted to say something. . . .

BOBBY

No, Mrs. Deacon. I have nothing—more to say. I'll—I'll go now.

DWIGHT

Good-night, Robert.

[INA *and* DWIGHT *transfer bags and wraps to the house.*]

BOBBY

Good-night, Mr. Deacon. Good-by, Di.

[DI *follows* BOBBY. *Right.*]

DI

Bobby, come back, you hate a lie—but what else could I do?

BOBBY

What else could you do? I'd rather they never let us see each other again than to lose you in the way I've lost you now.

DI

Bobby!

BOBBY

It's true. We mustn't talk about it.

DI

Bobby! I'll go back and tell them all.

BOBBY

You can't go back. Not out of a thing like that. Good-by, Di.

[*Exit.*]

[*Enter* DWIGHT *and* INA.]

DI

If you have any fear that I may elope with Bobby Larkin, let it rest. I shall never marry him if he asks me fifty times a day.

INA

Really, darling?

DI

Really and truly, and he knows it, too.

DWIGHT

A-ha! The lovelorn maiden all forlorn makes up her mind not to be so lorn as she thought she was. How does it seem not to be in love with him, Di—eh?

DI

Papa, if you make fun of me any more I'll—I'll let the first train of cars I can find run over me. . . .
[*Sobs as she runs to house.*]

MRS. BETT

Wait, darling! Tell grandma! Did Bobby have another wife too?
[*Exeunt* MRS. BETT *and* DI.]

INA

Di, I'd be ashamed, when papa's so good to you. Oh, my! what parents have to put up with. . . .

DWIGHT

Bear and forbear, pettie—bear and forbear. . . . By the way, Lulu, haven't I some mail somewhere about?

LULU

Yes, there's a letter there. I'll get it for you.
[*She reaches through the window.*]

DWIGHT

A-ha! An epistle from my dear brother Ninian.

INA

Oh, from Ninian, Dwight?

DWIGHT

From Ninian—the husband of Miss Lulu Bett. . . . You opened the letter? . . . Your sister has been opening my mail.

INA

But, Dwight, if it's from Ninian——

DWIGHT

It is my mail.

INA

Well, what does he say?

DWIGHT

I shall read the letter in my own time. My present concern is this disregard for my wishes. What excuse have you to offer?

LULU

None.

INA

Dwight, she knows what's in it and we don't. Hurry up.

DWIGHT

She is an ungrateful woman.

[*Opens the letter, with the clipping.*]

INA

[*Over his shoulder.*]

Ah! . . . Dwight, then he was . . .

DWIGHT

M—m—m—m. So after having been absent with my brother for a month you find that you were not married to him.

LULU

You see, Dwight, he told the truth. He did have another wife. He didn't just leave me.

DWIGHT

But this seems to me to make you considerably worse off than if he had.

LULU

Oh, no! No! If he hadn't—hadn't liked me, he wouldn't have told me about her. You see that, don't you?

DWIGHT

That your apology? . . . Look here, Lulu! This is a bad business. The less you say about it the better for all our sakes. You see that, don't you?

LULU

See that? Why, no. I wanted you to write to him so I could tell the truth. You said I mustn't tell the truth till I had the proofs.

DWIGHT

Tell whom?

LULU

Tell everybody. I want them to know.

DWIGHT

Then you care nothing for our feelings in this matter?

LULU

Your feelings?

DWIGHT

How this will reflect on us—it's nothing to you that we have a brother who's a bigamist?

LULU

But it's me—it's me.

DWIGHT

You! You're completely out of it. You've nothing more to say about it whatever. Just let it be as it is . . . drop it. That's all I suggest.

LULU

I want people to know the truth.

DWIGHT

But it's nobody's business but our business . . . for all our sakes let us drop this matter . . . Now I tell you, Lulu—here are three of us. Our interests are the same in this thing—only Ninian is our relative and he's nothing to you now. Is he?

LULU

Why——

DWIGHT

Let's have a vote. Your snap judgment is to tell this disgraceful fact broadcast. Mine is, least said soonest mended. What do you say, Ina?

INA

Oh, goodness—if we get mixed up in a scandal like this we'll never get away from it. Why, I wouldn't have people know of it for worlds.

DWIGHT

Exactly. Ina has stated it exactly. Lulu, I think you should be reconciled.

INA

My poor poor sister! Oh, Dwight! when I think of it—what have I done, what have *we* done—that I should have a good kind loving husband—be so protected, so loved, when other women . . . Darling! You *know* how sorry I am—we all are——

LULU

Then give me the only thing I've got—that's my pride. My pride that he didn't want to get rid of me.

DWIGHT

What about my pride? Do you think I want everybody to know that my brother did a thing like that?

LULU

You can't help that.

DWIGHT

But I want you to help it. I want you to promise me that you won't shame us like this before all our friends.

LULU

You want me to promise what?

DWIGHT

I want you—I ask you to promise me that you will keep this with us—a family secret.

LULU

No! No! I won't do it! I won't do it! I won't do it!

DWIGHT

You refuse to do this small thing for us?

LULU

Can't you understand anything? I've lived here all my life—on your money. I've not been strong enough to work they say—well, but I've been strong enough to be a hired girl in your house—and I've been glad to pay for my keep. . . . But there wasn't a thing about it that I liked. Nothing about being here that I liked. . . . Well, then I got a little something, same as other folks. I thought I was married and I went off on the train and he bought me things and I saw different towns. And then it was all a mistake. I didn't have any of it. I came back here and went into your kitchen again—I don't know why I came back. I suppose it's because I'm most thirty-four and new things ain't so easy any more—but what have I got or what'll I ever have? And

now you want to put on to me having folks look at me and think he run off and left me and having them all wonder. I can't stand it. I can't stand it. I can't. . . .

DWIGHT

You'd rather they'd know he fooled you when he had another wife?

LULU

Yes. Because he wanted me. How do I know—maybe he wanted me only just because he was lonesome, the way I was. I don't care why. And I won't have folks think he went and left me.

DWIGHT

That is wicked vanity.

LULU

That's the truth. Well, why can't they know the truth?

DWIGHT

And bring disgrace on us all?

LULU

It's me—It's me——

DWIGHT

You—you—you—you're always thinking of yourself.

LULU

Who else thinks of me. And who do you think of—who do you think of, Dwight? I'll tell you that,

because I know you better than any one else in the world knows you—better even than Ina. And I know that you'd sacrifice Ina, Di, mother, Monona, Ninian—everybody, just to your own idea of who you are. You're one of the men who can smother a whole family and not even know you're doing it.

DWIGHT

You listen to me. It's Ninian I'm thinking about.

LULU

Ninian. . . .

DWIGHT

Yes, yes . . . Ninian! . . . Of course if you don't care what happens to him, it doesn't matter.

LULU

What do you mean?

DWIGHT

If you don't love him any more. . . .

LULU

You know I love him. I'll always love him.

DWIGHT

That's likely. A woman doesn't send the man she loves to prison.

LULU

I send him to prison! Why, he's brought me the only happiness I've ever had. . . .

DWIGHT

But prison is just where he'll go and you'll be the one to send him there.

LULU

Oh! That couldn't be. . . . That couldn't be. . . .

DWIGHT

Don't you realize that bigamy is a crime? If you tell this thing he'll go to prison . . . nothing can save him.

LULU

I never thought of that. . . .

DWIGHT

It's time you did think. Now will you promise to keep this with us, a family secret?

LULU

Yes. I promise.

DWIGHT

You will? . . .

LULU

Yes . . . I will.

DWIGHT

A . . . h. You'll be happy some day to think you've done this for us, Lulu.

LULU

I s'pose so. . . .

INA

This makes up for everything. My sweet self-sacrificing sister!

LULU

Oh, stop that!

INA

Oh, the pity of it . . . the pity of it! . . .

LULU

Don't you go around pitying me! I'll have you know I'm glad the whole thing happened.

CURTAIN

ACT III

THE SAME. *Discover* MRS. BETT, *tidying the porch and singing. It is the following morning.* [*Enter* LULU *with bag.*]

MRS. BETT

Where you going now, for pity sakes?

LULU

Mother. Now, mother darling, listen and try to understand.

MRS. BETT

Well, I am listening, Lulie.

LULU

Mother, I can't stay here. I can't stay here any longer. I've got to get clear away from Dwight and Ina.

MRS. BETT

You want to live somewhere else, Lulie?

LULU

I can't live here and have people think Ninian left me. I can't tell the truth and bring disgrace on Ninian. And I can't stay here in Dwight's kitchen a day longer. Oh, mother! I wish you could see——

MRS. BETT

Why, Lulie, I do see that.

LULU

You do, mother?

MRS. BETT

I've often wondered why you didn't go before.

LULU

Oh, mother, you dear——

MRS. BETT

You needn't think because I'm old I don't know a thing or two.

LULU

You want me to go?

MRS. BETT

It's all I can do for you now, Lulie. Just to want you to go. I'm old and I'm weak and I can't keep care of you like when you was little.

LULU

Oh, mother, I'm so glad!

MRS. BETT

I ain't exactly glad——

LULU

Dearest, I mean I was so afraid you wouldn't understand——

MRS. BETT

Why wouldn't I understand, I'd like to know? You speak like I didn't have a brain in my skull.

LULU

No, dear, but——

MRS. BETT

You mind me, Lulie, and go on. Go on. . . . Say, scat's sake, you can't go. You ain't got any money.

LULU

Yes, mother, I have. I've got twelve dollars.

MRS. BETT

And I ain't got much. Only enough to bury me nice.

LULU

Don't you worry, mother. I'll be all right. I'll get work.

MRS. BETT

Mother wants to help you. Here, Lulie, you take my funeral fifty. Joke on Dwight to make him bury me.

LULU

Oh, no, mother, I couldn't.

MRS. BETT

You mind me, Lulie. Do as mother tells you.

LULU

Mother, dearest! Oh, I wish I could take you with me!

MRS. BETT

You needn't to worry about me. If I get lonesome I can give Dwight the dickens.

LULU

Good-by—dear—good-by. I'll go the back way, they won't see me.

[LULU *kisses her and turns away. Left.*]

MRS. BETT

Lulie. Mother loves you. You know that, don't you?

LULU

Dearest, yes—yes, I do know.

[*She goes.* MRS. BETT *trembles, turns, sees her dustcloth, goes on working and begins to hum.*]

[*Enter* DWIGHT.]

DWIGHT

Ready for breakfast, Mama Bett?

MRS. BETT

No, I ain't ready.

DWIGHT

Neither is the breakfast. Lulu must be having the tantrim.

MRS. BETT

I s'pose you think that's funny.

DWIGHT

Lulu ought to think of you—old folks ought to have regular meals——

MRS. BETT

Old? Old? Me, old?

DWIGHT

Well, you're hungry. That's what makes you so cross, Mama Bett.

MRS. BETT

All you think of is food, anyhow.

DWIGHT

Who has a better right? Who provides the food we eat?

MRS. BETT

That's all you're good for.

DWIGHT

Well, I may not amount to much in this old world of ours but I flatter myself I'm a good provider.

MRS. BETT

If I was going to brag I'd brag original.

DWIGHT

You mustn't talk like that. You know you're my best girl.

MRS. BETT

Don't you best-girl me.

DWIGHT

There, there, there. . . .

MRS. BETT

Now look at you. Walking all over me like I wasn't here—like I wasn't nowhere.

DWIGHT

Now, Mama Bett, you're havin' the tantrim.

MRS. BETT

Am I? All right then I am. What you going to do about it? How you going to stop me?

DWIGHT

Now, now, now, now. . . .

[*Enter* INA.]

INA

Dwight, I can't think what's happened to Lulu. Breakfast isn't even started.

DWIGHT

Lulu must be having a rendezvous.

[*Grandma snorts.*]

INA

That's randevoo, Dwightie. Not rendezvous.

DWIGHT

You two are pretty particular, seems to me.

MRS. BETT

Oh, no! We ain't used to the best.

[DI *is at the door.*]

DI

Hello, family! What's the matter with breakfast?

MRS. BETT

There ain't any.

INA

Di, let's you and I get breakfast just to show Aunt Lulu that we can.

MRS. BETT

Say if you two are going to get breakfast, I'll go over to Grandma Gates for a snack.

[*Enter* MONONA.]

MONONA

What do you s'pose? Aunt Lulu's trunk is locked and strapped in her room.

INA

Monona, stop imagining things.

MONONA

Well, it is. And I saw her going down the walk with her satchel when I was washing me.

DWIGHT

Lulu must be completely out of her mind.

MRS. BETT

First time I've known her to show good sense in years.

INA

Why, mama!

DWIGHT

Mother Bett, do you know where Lulu is?

MRS. BETT

Mother knows a-plenty.

INA

Mama, what do you mean?

MRS. BETT

I know all about Lulie being gone. She went this morning. I told her to go.

INA

Why, mama! How can you talk so! When Dwight has been so good to you and Lulu. . . .

MRS. BETT

Good, yes, he's give us a pillow and a baked potato——

DWIGHT

So! You and Lulu presume to upset the arrangement of my household without one word to me.

MRS. BETT

Upset, upset— You cockroach! . . .

INA

Monona! Stop listening. Now run away and play. Di, you go and begin breakfast.

DI

Yes, mummy.

MONONA

Aw, let me stay.

INA

[*Exeunt* DI *and* MONONA.]

Go at once, children.

Mother, you ought not to use such language before young people.

MRS. BETT

Don't you think they're fooled. What do you suppose Di was going to run away with Bobby Larkin for, only to get away from you.

DWIGHT

Mother Bett!

MRS. BETT

What do you suppose Lulu married Ninian for—only to get shed of both of you.

INA

Oh please, please, somebody think a little bit of me. Dwight, do go after Lulu—go to the depot—she couldn't get away before the 8:37.

DWIGHT

My dear Ina, my dignity——

INA

Oh, please do go!

DWIGHT

Oh, my heavens! what a house full of women——

INA

Dwight, we can't get along without Lulu.

DWIGHT

Upsetting things about my ears. . . .

[*Exit.*]

INA

Mama, I do think it's too bad of you—oh! now I'll try to get some breakfast.

[*Exit.*]

MRS. BETT

Going to try to, he-e!

[*Enter* MONONA.]

MONONA

Oh, grandma isn't it fun with so much going on!

MRS. BETT

What's that, you little ape?

MONONA

Oh, I just love it! Everybody makes such funny faces.

MRS. BETT

Some people are born with funny faces. Monona, ain't you ever going to grow up?

MONONA

Grandma, I am grown up.

MRS. BETT

You don't act like it.

MONONA

Well, grown folks don't neither.

MRS. BETT

Sh-hh-hhh, stop talking back to me.

MONONA

Everybody shushes me. If I don't talk, how'll they know I'm there?

MRS. BETT

I guess they could bear up if they didn't know you was there.

MONONA

I'd better get in, or I'll catch it.

[MONONA *sings a silly song.*]

MRS. BETT

[*Rocking in rhythm with the song.*]

Scot's sake, what am I doing! Them wicked words.

[*Enter* DI.]

DI

Monona, mama wants you.

MONONA

I'd better go or I'll catch it. I'll catch it anyway——

[*Exit.*]

[*Enter* NINIAN.]

DI

Uncle Ninian! Well it's just about time you showed up.

NINIAN

You're right, Di. But I came as soon as I could.

DI

You might as well know. I think you're a perfect slunge.

MRS. BETT

Land sakes!

NINIAN

Mrs. Bett.

MRS. BETT

Don't you come near me! Don't you speak to me! You whited centipede!

NINIAN

That's what I expected and that's what I deserve.

MRS. BETT

Move on! Move on!

NINIAN

Let me tell you something first, Mother Bett.

MRS. BETT

Don't you "mother" me.

NINIAN

Yes, that's just what I mean, *Mother* Bett. I've found that the woman I married died in Rio years ago. Here's a letter from the consul.

MRS. BETT

Dead? Ain't that nice! But what ailed you all the time? A man with any get-up-and-get would have known that all along.

NINIAN

I'm not excusing myself any, Mother Bett.

MRS. BETT

Well, perhaps you're as good as you know how to be. Anyway, your mother's responsible for a good deal without counting you.

NINIAN

Mother Bett, where is Lulu?

MRS. BETT

Who, Lulie? Oh, she's run away.

NINIAN

What do you say?

MRS. BETT

She's gone off on the train this morning. I told her to go.

NINIAN

Mother Bett, Mother Bett—where has she gone?

MRS. BETT

Gone to call her soul her own, I guess.

NINIAN

But Mother Bett, where did Lulu go?

MRS. BETT

She might be at the depot.

NINIAN

Can I catch her?

MRS. BETT

You can catch her if ye can run in them white—mittens.

NINIAN

Run? Watch me.

[*Exit running.*]

DI

Oh! Grandma, isn't it just too romantic?

MRS. BETT

What do you mean—rheumatic?

[*Enter* MONONA.]

MONONA

Breakfast's ready, grandma.

MRS. BETT

Breakfast! I wouldn't know coffee from flapjacks.

MONONA

I've been catching it all morning and I didn't do a thing.

MRS. BETT

What's that, little ape?

MONONA

Grandma, honestly, do you see why because Aunt Lulu ran away the whole family should pick on me?

MRS. BETT

Come here, you poor neglected child!

MONONA

Mama's getting breakfast and she's burned all over and she's so cross—m-m-m. Why here she comes now!

MRS. BETT

Who?

DI

Aunt Lulu!

[*Enter* LULU.]

LULU

Mother——

MONONA

Oh, goody—now they'll pick on you instead of me.

MRS. BETT

[*Softly.*]

Monona! You run down the road as tight as you can and catch your Uncle Ninian quick— Sh-sh-sh——

MONONA

Uncle Ninian! Oh—oh!

[*Exit.*]

LULU

Mother—what do you think I've heard?

MRS. BETT

Land knows! my head's whirlin'. Who found you?

LULU

Found me?

MRS. BETT

I can count up to 'leven in this house that's went after you or went after them that went after them— Oh land! . . .

LULU

Mother, the station agent said to me just now when I went to buy my ticket, he said, "You just missed your husband. He went hurrying up the street." I couldn't go till I knew.

DI

Why, Aunt Lulu, haven't you heard——

MRS. BETT

Sh-h-h-h— Leave it burst.

[*Enter* DWIGHT.]

DWIGHT

So . . . after making me traipse all over town for you and before breakfast. . . . What is the meaning of this, Lulu? Answer me.

MRS. BETT

Sit down, Dwight. Take off your hat why don't you?

[*Enter* INA.]

INA

Forevermore.

LULU

Were you looking for me, Dwight?

DWIGHT

What about our breakfast, may I ask?

LULU

Haven't you had your breakfast, Dwight? I had mine in the bakery.

MRS. BETT

In the bakery! On expense!

INA

Lulu, where have you been?

LULU

How good of you to miss me!

INA

Lulu, you don't act like yourself

LULU

That's the way I heard the women talk in Savannah, Georgia. "So good of you to miss me."

DWIGHT

Lulu, let's have no more of this nonsense. . . .

LULU

Whose nonsense, Dwight? I've left your home for good and all. I'm going somewhere else to work.

INA

Why, Lulu, what will people think of Dwight and me if we let you do that?

DWIGHT

So you thought better of the promise you made to us last evening not to tell our affairs broadcast.

LULU

Your affairs? No, Dwight, you can tell them anything you like when I'm gone.

INA

How am I ever going to keep house without you? Dwight, you've simply got to make her stay. When I think of what I went through while she was away . . . everything boils over, and what I don't expect to b-b-boil b-b-burns. Sister, how can you be so cruel when Dwight and I——

DWIGHT

Patience, patience, pettie . . . Lulu, I ask you to stay here where you belong.

LULU

No, Dwight, I'm through.

DWIGHT

So, sister mine, have you found some other man willing to run away with you?

LULU

That will do, Dwight. You've pretended so long you can't be honest with yourself, any of the time. Your whole life is a lie.

MRS. BETT

Save your breath, Lulie.

[*Enter* MONONA *with* NINIAN.]

DWIGHT

At least, Miss Lulu Bett, neither Ina nor I ever had to lie about our marriage.

MONONA

Here he is, grandma.

LULU

Oh. . . .

NINIAN

What's that your saying, Dwight?

INA

Forevermore!

LULU

Ninian. . . .

NINIAN

Lulu. . . . So I didn't miss you.

DWIGHT

Ha! ha! . . . The happy bridegroom comes at last. What's the meaning of this, Ninian?

NINIAN

I'll bet he's made life beautiful for you since you got back. Anything more to say, Dwight?

DWIGHT

Yes, Lulu was planning to run away. . . . I was telling her she'd better stay here at home where she'd have us to stand by her.

NINIAN

Yes, I've heard how you stood by her. You're a magnificent protector, you are!

DWIGHT

Look here, Nin, don't you feel that you have to sacrifice yourself. Lulu is well enough off here.

INA

She was quite happy until you came, Ninian.

NINIAN

You hypocrites!

MRS. BETT

Hypocrites! He-e!

INA

Children, stop listening to older people.

DI

Oh, mama! . . .

MONONA

[*Crying.*]

Oh . . . Let me stay!

INA

Children! . . .

[*Exeunt* DI *and* MONONA.]

Ninian, how can you say such things to us!

NINIAN

Lulu has suffered as much from you as she has from me.

MRS. BETT

That's right, Ninian. Plain talk won't hurt nobody around here.

NINIAN

Lulu, can you forgive me?

LULU

But Cora Waters . . . what of her?

DWIGHT

Yes, what about your other wife?

NINIAN

I haven't any other wife—just Lulu.

MRS. BETT

Cora Waters is dead. I knew it all along.

LULU

Ninian, is it true?

NINIAN

Yes, it's true.

MRS. BETT

He's confided in his mother. He told me all about it.

NINIAN

Will you come back to me, Lulu?

MRS. BETT

Better take him, Lulie. You can have that fifty to furnish up the parlor.

LULU

Oh, mother! I wish we could have you with us.

NINIAN

Do you forgive me?

LULU

I forgave you in Savannah, Georgia.

CURTAIN

ACT III

[*As originally produced December 27, 1920.*]

ACT III

THE PIANO STORE: *Empty, bare, three or four upright pianos with bright plush spreads and plush-covered stools. Back, a dark green sateen curtain. It is the following morning.*

[*Discover* CORNISH *at a little table, on which is opened a large black book.*]

[*Enter* MONONA, *carrying basket of parcels.*]

MONONA

Oh, Mr. Cornish. . . .

CORNISH

Hello, there, Monona! How's everything?

MONONA

Everything's perfectly awful up to our house.

CORNISH

Miss Lulu's all right, I hope?

MONONA

Aunt Lulu is——

CORNISH

There! I knew it. I know this thing was going to wind up in a fit of sickness——

MONONA

Sick. . . . No. She's gone.

CORNISH

Gone! Miss Lulu gone?

MONONA

Run away.

CORNISH

Oh, with who?

MONONA

Nobody, I guess. She skipped out of the house early this morning. It was me saw her going down the walk with her bag. It was me told everybody. It was me found her trunk packed and locked in her room. That's all.

CORNISH

This is terrible, terrible—and your people not home yet?

MONONA

I should say they are. Came last night.

CORNISH

But what are they doing to find her?

MONONA

Papa said he wouldn't do a thing. Mamma's been getting breakfast and she's burned all over, and she's so cross—m-m!

CORNISH

Yes, but aren't they trying to find Lulu—your Aunt Lulu——

MONONA

Grandma says she knows she's dead. Probably she's drowned in the river and they'll get her out with her hair all stringy——

CORNISH

See here. I think I'll come up to your house. I'll put a little notice on my door——

MONONA

I better go now. I'll catch it anyhow. I've been catching it all the morning and I didn't do a thing. Mr. Cornish, honestly, do you see why, because Aunt Lulu ran away, the whole family should pick on me?

CORNISH

Well, we must all help as much as we can, Monona——

MONONA

Up to our house, honestly, you'd think I was the one that had done it. And I may!

[*Exit, running.*]

CORNISH

I'll be right there, as soon as I can lock up.

[*He disappears behind the green curtain. Pause.*]

[*Enter* LULU.]

LULU

Mr. Cornish. Mr. Cornish.
[CORNISH *appears.*]

CORNISH

Well!

LULU

Well!

CORNISH

You're out early.

LULU

Oh, no!

CORNISH

My, but I'm glad to see you. Won't you sit down?

LULU

I can only stay a minute. Wasn't that Monona just went out of here?

CORNISH

Yes, that was Monona.

LULU

Did she say anything about me?

CORNISH

She—she said you'd run away. She—she must have been mistaken.

LULU

No, she wasn't. I have.

CORNISH

Why, Miss Lulu!

LULU

Or I'm going on the 10:10. My bag's in the bakery. I had my breakfast in the bakery. . . . I've left them for good.

CORNISH

Then I suppose he cut up like a hyena over that letter being opened.

LULU

Oh, he forgave me that.

CORNISH

Forgave you!

LULU

Overlooked it, rather.

CORNISH

Anyway he's convinced now about that other Mrs. Ninian Deacon?

LULU

Yes, but you mustn't say anything about that, please, ever.

CORNISH

Even now? Well, I'll be jumped up. *Even now?* Then—I guess I see why you're going.

LULU

It isn't only that. I'm going . . . I'm *going!*

CORNISH

I see. Would—would you tell me where?

LULU

Maybe. After a while.

CORNISH

I do want you to. Because I—I think you're a brick.

LULU

Oh, no!

CORNISH

Yes, you are. By George! you don't find very many *married* women with as good sense as you've got. That is, I mean——

LULU

All right. I know. Thank you.

CORNISH

You've been a jewel in their home—I know that. They're going to miss you no end.

LULU

They'll miss my cooking.

CORNISH

They'll miss more than that. I've watched you there. . .

LULU

You have?

CORNISH

You made the whole place go.

LULU

You don't mean just the cooking?

CORNISH

No.

LULU

I never had but one compliment before that wasn't for my cooking. He told me I done up my hair nice. . . . That was after I took notice how the ladies in Savannah, Georgia, done up theirs.

CORNISH

Well, well, well! . . .

LULU

I must go now. I wanted to say good-by to you. . . .

CORNISH

I hate to have you go. I—I hate to have you go.

LULU

Oh, well!

CORNISH

Look here, I wish—I wish you weren't going.

LULU

Do you? Good-by.

CORNISH

Can't I come to the depot with you?

LULU

You can't leave the store alone.

CORNISH

Yes. I'll put a little notice on the door. . . .

LULU

No. That would be bad for the business. Good-by.

CORNISH

Good-by, Miss Lulu! Good-by, good-by, good-by! . . .

LULU

There's something else. I'm going to tell you—I don't care what Dwight says.

[*Takes letter from her handbag.*]

As long as I told you the other part, I'm going to tell you this.

CORNISH

I want to know everything you'll let me know.

LULU

See—at the office this morning was this. It's from Ninian.

CORNISH

Well, I should think he'd better write.

LULU

Nobody must know. It was bad enough for the family before, but now . . . here it is:

". . . just want you to know you're actually rid of me. I've heard from her, in Brazil. She ran out of money and thought of me, and her lawyer wrote to me. . . ."

. . . he incloses the lawyer's letter.

"I've never been any good—Dwight would tell you that if his pride would let him tell the truth once in a while. But there isn't anything in my life makes me feel as bad as this. . . ."

. . . well, that part doesn't matter. But you see. He didn't lie to get rid of me—and she was alive just as he thought she might be!

CORNISH

And you're free now.

LULU

That's so—I am. I hadn't thought of that. . . . It's late. Now I'm really going. Good-by.

CORNISH

Don't say good-by.

LULU

It's nearly train time.

CORNISH

Don't you go. . . . Do you think you could possibly stay here with me?

LULU

Oh! . . .

CORNISH

I haven't got anything. I guess maybe you've heard something about a little something I'm supposed to inherit. Well, it's only five hundred dollars. . . . That little Warden house—it don't cost much—you'd be surprised. Rent, I mean. I can get it now. I went and looked at it the other day but then I didn't think . . . well, I mean, it don't cost near as much as this store. We could furnish up the parlor with pianos . . . that is, if you could ever think of such a thing as marrying me.

LULU

But—you *know!* Why, don't the disgrace——

CORNISH

What disgrace?

LULU

Oh, you—you——

CORNISH

There's only this about that. Of course, if you loved him very much then I ought not to be talking this way to you. But I didn't think——

LULU

You didn't think what?

CORNISH

That you did care so very much about him. I don't know why.

LULU

I wanted somebody of my own. That's the reason I done what I done. I know that now.

CORNISH

I figured that way. . . . Look here, I ought to tell you. I'm—I'm awful lonesome myself. This is no place to live. Look—look here.

[*He draws the green curtain, revealing the mean little cot and washstand.*]

I guess living so is one reason why I want to get married. I want some kind of a home.

LULU

Of course.

CORNISH

I ain't never lived what you might say private.

LULU

I've lived too private.

[*Pause.*]

CORNISH

Then there's another thing. I—I don't believe I'm ever going to be able to do anything with the law.

LULU

I don't see how anybody does.

CORNISH

And I'm not much good in a business way. Sometimes I think that I may never be able to make any money.

LULU

Lots of men don't.

CORNISH

Well, there it is. I'm no good at business. I'll never be a lawyer. And—and everything I say sounds wrong to me. And yet I do believe that I'd know enough not to bully a woman. Not to make her unhappy. Maybe—even, I could make her a little happy.

LULU

Lots of men do.

[*Voices.*]

[*Enter* INA, DWIGHT *and* MRS. BETT.]

INA

Oh, Dwight! she's still here.

DWIGHT

So this is where we find our Lulu!

LULU

Did you want me, Dwight?

INA

Want you? Why, Lulu! are you crazy? Of course we want you. Why aren't you home?

[*Nursing her wrist, which is bandaged, with the other hand, which is bandaged, too.*]

MRS. BETT

Lulie, Lulie, we thought you'd gone off again.

LULU

Mother, darling. . . .

DWIGHT

Here am I kept home from the office, trying my best to take your place. You're a most important personage, Miss Lulu Bett.

LULU

What did you want of me?

INA

Want of you? Why, my goodness. . . .

DWIGHT

If you had tasted bacon fried as the bacon was fried which I have tasted this day——

INA

Oh, Dwight, that's not funny!

DWIGHT

No. And the muffins were not funny either. Yes they were!

LULU

How good of you to miss me!

INA

Lulu, you don't act like yourself.

LULU

That was the way I heard the women talk in Savannah, Georgia. "So good of you to miss me."

DWIGHT

Lulu, what does this mean? No more of this nonsense.

LULU

Whose nonsense, Dwight?

DWIGHT

We know that your trunk is locked and strapped in your room and you were seen going down the street with a bag. You have flown here, presumably to discuss your situation with an outsider. Is this fair to us?

LULU

What do you want me to do, Dwight?

INA

Do? Why, we want you to come home.

LULU

Home!

DWIGHT

Also to explain your amazing behavior.

CORNISH

May I do that, Miss Lulu?

LULU

No—no thank you. I think I'd like to speak for myself. Dwight, I've left your home for good and all.

INA

Sister. . . .

MRS. BETT

Lulie . . . Lulie! . . .

DWIGHT

Ah-ha! You have thought better of the promise you made to Ina and me last evening not to tell our affairs broadcast.

LULU

I've thought no better of it—and no worse. I couldn't. But I've been thinking of something else. Of you, Dwight.

DWIGHT

Ah—I'm flattered.

LULU

. . . Let it go at that. . . . In any case, I've left your home.

INA

But where are you going?

LULU

I meant to go somewhere else and work.

INA

Go somewhere else and work. Cook? Lulu, have you no consideration for Dwight and me at all? What would people think if we let you do that. . . .

DWIGHT

Patience, patience, pettie. Let's have no more of this, Lulu. I imagine you're not quite well. Come home with us, now, there's a good girl.

LULU

No, Dwight.

INA

Lulu, I simply can't keep house without you. When I think of going through with what I went through this summer while you were away. . . . Everything b-boils over and what I don't expect to b-boil b-burns. . . .

[*Sobs.*]

Dwightie, you've got to make her stay.

DWIGHT

Pettie—control yourself. . . . Lulu, I ask you, I implore you, to come back home with us.

CORNISH

Miss Lulu. . . .

LULU

Yes?

CORNISH

May I tell them?

LULU

What is there to tell them?

CORNISH

I think Miss Lulu and I are going to—arrange.

LULU

O but not yet—not yet.

DWIGHT

What—you? You and Cornish? I should think not. How can you?

LULU

Cora Waters is alive. Ninian's heard from her. There's her lawyer's letter.

INA

Forevermore!

MRS. BETT

What you talking—what you talking. I want to know but I ain't got something in my head. . . . Lulie, you ain't going to get married again, are you—after waiting so long?

DWIGHT

Don't be disturbed, Mother Bett. She wasn't married that first time. No marriage about it.

INA

Dwight! If Lulu marries Mr. Cornish, then everybody'll have to know about Ninian and his other wife.

LULU

That's so. You would have to tell, wouldn't you? I never thought of that. Well—you can get used to the idea while I'm gone.

DWIGHT

Gone?

INA

Gone where?

MRS. BETT

Where you goin' now, for pity sakes?

LULU

Away. I thought I wanted somebody of my own. Well, maybe it was just myself.

DWIGHT

What ridiculous talk is this?

CORNISH

Lulu—couldn't you stay with me——

LULU

Sometime, maybe. I don't know. But first I want to see out of my own eyes. For the first time in my life. Good-by, mother.

MRS. BETT

Lulie, Lulie. . . .

LULU

[*At the door.*]

Good-by. Good-by, all of you. I'm going I don't

know where—to work at I don't know what. But I'm going from choice!

[*Exit.*]

[CORNISH *follows her.*]

MRS. BETT

Who's going to do your work now, I'd like to know?

CURTAIN (3)